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A NEW OTHELLO.

A NOVEL.

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AUTHOR OF "LOVE, HONOUR AND OBEY," "NOT EASILY JEALOUS," "ONLY A LOVE STORY,"
"LOVE IN IDLENESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER IV.

DOCTOR FITZALLAN.

"Do we move ourselves? or are we moved by an unseen hand at a game?"

DR. FITZALLAN bowed—a little lower and more formally than the average Englishman generally bows on introduction—and without delay or prefatory remark plunged into serious conversation.

"Are you at all interested in the subject of mesmerism?" he inquired.

"I—I can hardly venture to say I am interested in anything I know so little about," Eileen replied. She was shy, but curious; she coloured a little and looked aside half timidly as she answered, feeling uncomfortably that *she* could not talk to him as cleverer girls could on such topics.

"You have not gone into the subject at all?" he pursued.

"No," she admitted, "I never have—but I—I think I——"

"You *would* soon become interested," he said, finishing her sentence for her. His tone was assured—even authoritative. She felt compelled to look up in his face, shy and timid though she was. When once she had raised her eyes to his, she could not turn them away again. Something in his gaze held hers, fixed and fascinated.

Dr. Fitzallan was a man who seldom smiled—not that his calm and serious composure of expression partook in the least of sadness. There was nothing of melancholy in his look; his unsmiling aspect seemed simply due to the fact that he did not find much in life to provoke smiles. But now the shadow of a smile

flickered under his heavy moustache, and softened the firm, even hard lines of his mouth.

"You are of a susceptible, sensitive temperament," he observed quietly. "Yes, you would be a very good subject."

He turned to the host.

"Mr. Houghton, if this young lady will give me her kind assistance, I think she will prove susceptible to the influence—if there is no objection to my trying the experiment?"

He glanced round, as if anticipating possible prohibition from some anxious parent. Mr. Houghton looked at Mrs. Percival, who, seeing what was going on, hastened forward. The general attention was now fixed on the little group by the hearth.

Eileen, blushing, half flattered, half frightened, cast a timid and appealing glance from Dr. Fitzallan to Mrs. Percival. The latter thought it was time to put in *her* word.

"My little cousin—Miss Dundas—is in my care," she said. "She is not at all strong, and I should really be afraid to sanction any experiments with her if there is the slightest doubt—the least possibility—of there being any injurious consequences——"

Dr. Fitzallan vouchsafed another faint smile as he met her doubtful look with one of self-confident power, a loftily superior air of reassurance.

"They could not be injurious, madam," he said calmly and positively. "I can see Miss Dundas's temperament at a glance. The influence cannot fail to be purely beneficial to her. It is for you to decide, of course," he added deferentially, though with the same tone and attitude of confidence and mastery; "but I can assure you there is not the slightest cause for apprehension of anything but a good effect."

Eileen looked inquiringly at her cousin. She herself really did not know what she wished, and with her natural docility she waited for Momie's opinion. Mr. and Mrs. Houghton also, standing by deeply interested, looked eagerly at Mrs. Percival. Of course her decision must be conclusive here—but it did seem to them that it would be a pity that any scruple, however natural and conscientious, of hers should deprive them of the opportunity of witnessing some manifestation of Dr. Fitzallan's powers.

Mrs. Percival for her part hesitated. She was interested, curious, anxious to see what he could do. But—to trust Eileen, delicate, nervous Eileen, to this stranger's influence? She wondered what Geoffrey and Ray would say? For the wills and wishes of Messrs. Geoffrey and Ray ruled the Percival household. But the ruling powers were far away and there was no time to deliberate about their probable opinion on the matter. Mrs. Percival was very ignorant of the nature and extent of the magnetic force. She had heard and talked a little, had read less, and seen nothing of its manifestations. As Eileen deferred to her, she ended by appealing to Eileen.

"What do you say, dear?"

That settled the question. Eileen had nothing to say except what Dr. Fitzallan's look, kindly, but compelling, obliged her to say: that she didn't mind—that she was quite willing to do anything they liked. And they—doctor, host, hostess and assembled company—were all anxious, the one to exhibit, the rest to witness, some evidence of Dr. Fitzallan's mesmeric power, and he saw no one present who seemed to him so well calculated to afford an opportunity of such exhibition as Eileen Dundas.

He placed the girl in a chair; the host anxiously requested silence, and the company eagerly gathered round—preserving, however, the respectful distance which the doctor desired.

Most of those present were "outsiders—" ignorant dabblers in the little shallow pools that fringe the sea of knowledge of those forces as yet so imperfectly comprehended by even the wisest of us—a sea whose depths none yet have fathomed. They had just that amount of superficial acquaintance with those subjects which is apt to cause an inclination to boundless belief. This tendency is at the least a step in advance of materialism—the great wave of reaction against which stirs and ruffles the tiny shallow pondlets as well as the ocean deeps.

Regarding magnetism as the key to the mysteries of Nature, they were delighted to witness the operation of a master-hand upon the key, whether they themselves had or had not the slightest power of turning it in the lock; and they watched with eager attention Dr. Fitzallan's proceedings with regard to Eileen Dundas.

"You are not strong?" he said, bending his keen and cold blue eyes not unkindly on her delicate face. "Are you feeling quite well to-night? or are you at all suffering—or in any pain?"

"I have neuralgia all over one side of my head right down to the shoulder," the girl answered; "but it is not very bad. I often have it worse."

"So—so," he said, nodding comprehendingly. "Well, we must see to that."

Some of the company were uttering whispered comments and conjectures upon the to them unfamiliar phenomena of mesmerism. One wondered audibly whether he would make her stare at a silver disc. Another made the cheerful suggestion that people sometimes went into fits!

"Do they?" inquired Mrs. Percival anxiously.

"Certainly, they may," Dr. Fitzallan replied with unruffled calm, "when the operator does not know what he's about. When he knows his business they don't. Now, if you ladies and gentlemen will kindly keep the room quiet for a few minutes, we will see what I can do with Miss Dundas. Look at me," he added to Eileen, laying his hand lightly upon her head.

Some few of the lookers-on were well acquainted with the magnetic sleep-inducing process; but to the majority it was a new

thing to actually witness it, much as they might have heard of it; and they watched Eileen Dundas with eager interest, as under Dr. Fitzallan's compelling gaze and the light touch of his directing hand, she sank quickly into a deep sleep.

The doctor regarded her keenly and critically, then took hold of her hand, and after a minute or two's attentive inspection, raised her arm and passed his fingers down it two or three times. When he let go of the arm it remained uplifted and extended in the air; the girl lay back in her chair motionless as marble, without a tremor in the upraised arm that might have been a statue's.

He took a step backward, his eyes still fixed upon her.

"As I thought," he observed, contemplating his handiwork with a cool satisfied nod. "An excellent subject."

He turned to Mrs. Percival.

"Would you like to speak to your niece, and touch her?" He had mistaken the relationship, and not unnaturally imagined the elder lady to be aunt of the younger.

"Won't it do her harm to be roused?" Mrs. Percival demurred.

"Try to rouse her," he said.

Mrs. Percival tried, spoke to her, touched her, but of course in vain; the girl was fast bound in the magnetic trance.

"Can you move her arm?" he suggested.

Mrs. Percival gently and carefully made the endeavour; she might as well have tried to move an arm of stone.

"Now," said Dr. Fitzallan, addressing the sleeping girl, "how do you feel?"

Eileen answered immediately,

"Quite well."

"Is the neuralgia better?"

"Much better."

He presently stepped aside, partly behind Eileen's chair and quite out of her sight, even had her eyes been open. He fumbled in his pockets, and finally drew out a red morocco card-case. He returned to a position commanding a view of her face, holding out the card-case at arm's length some little distance behind her head, so that it was impossible she could have obtained, under any circumstances, waking or sleeping, a glimpse of it without turning.

"Can you see what I hold in my hand?" he demanded.

"I don't know. I don't think I can."

"Try!" he said authoritatively. "Come; make the attempt. Try to tell me what I hold in my hand!"

The girl did not turn her head nor move an eyelid, but slightly knitted her brows, as if straining her attention.

"It is something small—square," she said slowly.

"What colour?"

"Red—darkish red. Ah, I see! it is a red morocco card-case, it has a gilt monogram on it."

The spectators could not refrain from uttering various notes of

admiration. Exclamations of "Wonderful!" "Remarkable!" "Successful!" "Conclusive!" rippled round the circle.

Dr. Fitzallan tried one or two more such simple and well-known experiments with perfect success; then Mrs. Percival inquired anxiously if Eileen ought to remain so long in the trance.

"It will do her no harm," he replied; "indeed, you will see she will feel all the better. Still, perhaps for a first trial the experiment has lasted long enough; and I think it has been in every way satisfactory."

He cast an interrogative glance round the circle at the last words, and the chorus pronounced it eminently satisfactory, in a variety of terms, but with gratifying unanimity of sentiment.

With a word or two and a few passes of the hands he awakened Eileen, who looked around her with a half-puzzled air, as if just aroused from deep slumber.

"Have I been asleep?" she asked.

"Yes. Have you been dreaming at all?"

"No. I did not know I had been asleep," she said innocently and wonderingly,

"You don't remember any dreams, eh? And the neuralgia—is that any better now?"

"Why, it is quite gone!" she said, putting her hand up to her head.

"I have effected many cures of similar cases. Neuralgic pains are amongst those which are especially amenable to the treatment," he observed.

Mrs. Percival pricked up her ears. What if this new doctor, who had just given them what to her seemed so wonderful an exhibition of his power, should prove able to restore dear little delicate Eily to the rosy health and strength of the rest of the girls?

Dr. Fitzallan was of course the centre of attraction and interest; he was surrounded by a group of inquirers, all eager, one after another, to claim his attention, and, most of them, to put more or less silly questions. Mrs. Percival bided her time, and took an early opportunity of asking their host whether Dr. Fitzallan was settling in London with a view to establishing a practice, whether he was a married man, whether he came with good recommendations, and whether he was now ready to visit and receive patients? Her questions all having been most satisfactorily answered in the affirmative, and being assured that Dr. Fitzallan had had a large practice in America, and was, to the best of Houghton's belief, a perfectly trustworthy adviser in every way, she next availed herself of the first chance of entering into conversation with the doctor aside, and inquiring whether he thought that the magnetic treatment would be really beneficial to Miss Dundas?

"I think it would do her great good," he replied; "it certainly

would do her no harm. I have of course had no opportunity of making anything approaching a thorough diagnosis of Miss Dundas's case. But from what I see, I should say it is a simple one, and most susceptible of our treatment."

"I wonder," said Mrs. Percival, still a little irresolute, "if it would be convenient to you to—to—er—call some day and make a diagnosis"—she was pleased with this word and dwelt upon it with satisfaction—"or, perhaps," she added, with a vague idea that galvanic batteries or electrical machines of some mysterious and possibly not portable kind might be a part of the treatment, "I could bring her to you, if you would prefer that?"

"If you would like, Mrs. Dundas, to place your niece under my medical care for a time, I shall be happy to call and see what I can do for her."

He had mistaken both the name and the relationship, but Mrs. Percival was pursuing her subject with too much interest to stop to correct him.

"Is the treatment a lengthy one? Does it take a long time?" she inquired cautiously, as one who hesitatingly commits a little skiff to unknown seas.

"That depends," he replied in his usual cool way. "But it can be stopped at any hour. If after a time of trial you are not satisfied with the improvement in Miss Dundas's health, it is merely to cease the treatment; there is no harm done by the cessation."

"Well," said Mrs. Percival, suddenly making up her mind and throwing aside all doubt and hesitation, "I shall be very glad, Dr. Fitzallan, if you can do my little cousin any good. And when will it suit you to call? I daresay your time is much occupied; so pray name your own hour and day," she added graciously.

He drew out his pocket-book, consulted it with his accustomed deliberation, and informed her that he could call the next day about four o'clock, if that would be convenient to her.

"Do you hear what we are arranging in your behalf, little woman?" said Mrs. Percival, turning to Eileen. "Dr. Fitzallan is going to try and cure your neuralgia and set up your strength."

"Yes; I hope we shall have Miss Dundas feeling quite a new creature in a little time," he observed, looking kindly at Eileen in answer to her shy appealing smile. There was that soft fawn-like look in her dark eyes which gives so winning a charm to a fair young face.

Mrs. Percival and Eileen reached home before the rest of the family, who lingered late at their dance, and presently all returned radiant and in high spirits. It had been a delightful affair! plenty of men! and a splendid floor! Gertrude had danced every dance, round and square. Rhoda had been fairly beset with partners, and had waltzed four times with such a handsome man, the finest dancer in the room! Kate was smiling and satisfied,

and inclined to dilate on sundry evidences of Dr. Barnabas Grey's devotion, which seemed to have been especially manifested when they had "sat out" a dance in the conservatory.

"Where we have good reason to believe," added Rhoda saucily, "that Barnacles got very sweet!"

But these mild tales of triumph were thrown into the shade by Mrs. Percival's narration of the strange experiences of *her* evening. The tale of course was hers to tell, as Eileen had no consciousness of any of the incidents of her magnetic sleep. It only seemed to her that she had dropped into a doze for a few minutes, and she was amazed to learn that during that slumber she had talked and answered questions.

The girls were one and all much interested. They were as ignorant as babies of the power whose simplest manifestations—as evidenced that night—were to them so strange and startling.

Only Gertrude, the eldest, discreetest and wisest of the quartette, suggested the doubt which had occurred to Mrs. Percival herself, although she had not put it into words—what would Geoffrey think of this new treatment as applied to Eileen? and how would Ray regard it?

Mrs. Percival's reply—to her own doubts as well as to Gertrude's—was the relation of some of the tales of wondrous cures which she had heard that night, and especial dwelling on the fact that the neuralgia which had racked Eileen's head with pain had been completely conjured away.

Eileen herself was divided between a sense of shy pleasure and innocent excitement at having been, albeit so unconsciously, the heroine of the evening, and an uneasy wonder whether Geoff and Ray would laugh at all this? Geoffrey's incredulity would carry with it Eileen's disbelief. If he said it was so, or it was not so, his word would go far to convince Eileen against the evidence of her own senses.

The next day, about the appointed hour, Dr. Fitzallan kept his engagement. He found all the family assembled in the drawing-room; for the girls, true daughters of Eve, had unanimously given up the visits they had intended to pay that afternoon, and remained at home to see him.

Mrs. Percival came forward to meet him with the double cordiality of her habitual warm-hearted good-nature and her lately aroused interest. The Houghtons were certainly the first discoverers of this new centre of attraction; but she was at least second in the field.

"I am a little behind my time, I fear," he said.

"Not at all; I assure you you are very punctual."

"And how is Miss Dundas to-day?" he asked as Eileen, following her cousin, came forward to greet him. "Any recurrence of the neuralgia?"

"A little," she replied; "but not so bad as I often have it."

Kitty, who was nearer the door than Gertrude or Rhoda, was taking mental notes of the new doctor's appearance with unconcealed curiosity. Catching her glance, Mrs. Percival introduced Eileen's sister, "Miss Kate Dundas," and, turning to the others, added the brief introduction:

"My sister, Miss Carresford, and my daughter."

Dr. Fitzallan glanced up quickly, with almost a startled look. He bowed with that deep and deferential courtesy and seriousness which imparted a certain old-world foreign air to his salutation. His glance passed lightly over pretty Kate, and fixed instantly with interest on Gertrude.

"Do you see any of the qualities in the rest of my little flock which you saw last night in Eileen, which made you think directly that she would be a good subject for the—the mesmeric treatment?" Mrs. Percival inquired, observing a certain intentness in the regard he bent on Gertrude.

His eyes turned slowly from one to another of the "little flock."

"No," he replied. "As far as one can judge at a first glance, I should say that Miss Eileen Dundas is the only 'sensitive' of your family. Of course there are many various grades and degrees of sensitiveness. I should imagine, for instance, that Miss Carresford was more susceptible to such influences than this young lady, Miss——." He paused interrogatively as he looked at Rhoda.

"Percival—Rhoda Percival," her mother answered, smiling, "my only daughter."

"Miss Percival," he repeated slowly. "Excuse my mistaking the names. I had not the pleasure of seeing your card, and only caught your name imperfectly."

The interest with which he had looked at Gertrude was now transferred to the gaze he fixed on Mrs. Percival's face—a keen look of observant inspection, so free and fearless it had a touch of daring, one might almost say, of defiance.

A bold and straightforward look has almost always a certain charm for women. The general impression which Dr. Fitzallan produced at first acquaintance on all the family was not an unpleasant one.

"I don't think I should be in the smallest degree susceptible," observed Gertrude.

"And I'm sure I shouldn't," protested Rhoda.

"Probably not," Dr. Fitzallan admitted, glancing at the latter's blooming face; "but it is impossible to be quite sure."

And something in that piercing glance made Rhoda feel a secret wavering of doubt whether after all she *was* so very sure that it was possible to be absolutely certain of impenetrability in regard to a mysterious and uncomprehended influence. The girls all agreed, when they compared notes, that there certainly was an atmosphere of powerful and indomitable will about this

Dr. Fitzallan, which made it easy to understand his possessing such an influence as that he claimed to exercise.

Presently, in obedience to a suggestion of Mrs. Percival's, doctor and patient were left alone with her. She took up a piece of fancy work, and settled herself in her armchair with an air of wishing to be regarded as a piece of the furniture of the room, but a deeply-interested and curious piece of furniture, as her expressive face betrayed.

Dr. Fitzallan asked Eileen a few simple questions about her health, and then proceeded to put her to sleep as before, only this time he practised no experiments, and confined himself to magnetizing the side of her head and neck which were chiefly affected by the neuralgia. On awaking, as on the previous occasion, she was quite freed from pain, and said she felt altogether better and stronger.

"Well, dear," suggested Mrs. Percival presently, "suppose you go and tell Kitty how well you are getting on, while I have a little chat with the doctor? Now, Dr. Fitzallan," she added, as the door closed behind Eileen, "please tell me just what your opinion is about my dear girl."

"Miss Dundas is in a very nervous and delicate state of health," he replied; "but you have no ground for uneasiness. There is nothing radically or organically wrong with her. As she grows stronger these neuralgic pains and the attacks of faintness she describes will cease."

"Tonics don't seem to do her any good," observed Mrs. Percival; "quinine and iron don't give her strength. We have tried everything."

"And unsuccessfully," he rejoined. "Hers is not a case for drugs; but under the magnetic treatment I think you will find her health improve very rapidly; and, as you can see for yourself, it is a perfectly simple and innocuous method. You have felt, I see, some little qualms of doubt as to entrusting the young lady to a curative process which I perceive is quite new to you; but those doubts will soon be, if they are not already, removed. Three or four of these magnetic sleeps in a week and you will soon see strength and health restored to your niece—cousin——"

"Yes, she is my cousin; but really these two young cousins of mine, brought up with my own children, are almost like daughters to me."

"They are very fortunate in having such a relative to care for them. You have other children, Mrs. Percival?"

"One other—my eldest—my son," she answered, with the involuntary accent of proud affection with which she always spoke of Ray. "He is now travelling with my brother. Our family relations are curiously mixed, the two generations hopelessly tangled together," she added, smiling. "My brother and my boy are more like two brothers than uncle and nephew."

"Yes?" he said in polite interrogation. "You must have married very young, of course?"

"Out of the schoolroom," she answered, truly enough; "so my brother was a little fellow in knickerbockers when my boy was born."

"A delightful relationship," he observed. "And they are now on their travels together?"

"Yes, homeward bound, I am glad to say," replied Mrs. Percival, who did not belong to the reserved class, and was quite ready to take a stranger into her confidence if the stranger appeared sympathetic. "We expect them back next week; they are coming from New York; sailed yesterday on the 'City of Naples.'"

"On the 'City of Naples'?" he repeated, his expression of courteous interest wakening up to an almost startled look of livelier curiosity. "Why, my wife is coming over on board that vessel!"

"Indeed?" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, also with lively interest. "What a coincidence! Very likely," she added, giving rein to her imagination, "they have already met and made acquaintance, little thinking that *we* have had the pleasure of making *your* acquaintance here at home. And I am sure it is very fortunate for dear Eileen that *we* have met you. Ray and Geoffrey will be glad to find her so much better."

"Those are your travellers—your brother and son?"

"Yes, Geoffrey is my brother—Geoffrey Carresford," said Mrs. Percival, who was a most satisfactory person to get information out of. Dr. Fitzallan did not appear to her at all unusually or singularly interested in the branches of her family tree. She was ready and willing to talk of her dear ones, and regarded it as only natural that he should be equally ready to listen. When she asked him to fix the next appointment, and kindly left it to him to name his own time, she had no idea that in his secret heart he was vexedly and seriously deliberating with himself whether or not he should consent to continue his attendance on Eileen Dundas, in the new light of the discovery of her family relations. His hesitation ended, however, in defiance of the suggestions of prudence, in the decision that he was already too much interested professionally in the treatment of so promising a subject to give up the case—even though the girl did belong by the ties of birth and blood, as well as of daily home-life, to the Carresfords.

So while the great steamer ploughed her steady and majestic way over the long slow swell of the Atlantic waves, bearing Geoffrey and Ray homeward to the bosom of their family, eagerly and fondly waiting to welcome the dear wanderers back—bearing Mrs. Fitzallan also to the husband who, of course, was equally eagerly and affectionately awaiting her—this husband was putting Eileen Dundas through the course of magnetic treatment most success-

fully, and her sister and cousins were rejoicing in her improvement. The acquaintance rapidly developed into a superficial intimacy—a shallow but agreeable social intercourse. Mrs. Percival and the girls talked a great deal of Geoffrey and Ray, and Dr. Fitzallan now and then talked a little, but a very little, of his wife. And day by day Eileen's soft dark eyes grew brighter, and a little fitful colour came slowly back to her cheeks and lips as the great "City of Naples" drew nearer and nearer to the land; and not one of all that radiant and happy little circle dreamt how

"More than one and more than two
The sorrow of this should see."

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE SPELL.

"The wine is bright at the goblet's brim,
Though the poison lurk beneath."

THE Percivals lived in one of those favoured localities which combine the advantages of London and the country, at the small cost of being called suburban by Hyde Park and Belgravia. They were within easy reach of the great central thoroughfares, and were no impracticable nor uncomfortable distance from the theatres, galleries, and other chief objects of interest. All the social and other benefits of London life were theirs; while yet in the garden which lay concealed by high walls and higher trees behind their house, all the charms, the peace and seclusion of the country were to be found.

The house stood on a slight eminence; in front was a narrow slip of flower-garden, and behind it the ground, which declined in a rapid slope, had been laid out in three terraces. The uppermost one was a fine smooth lawn, like a stretch of soft green velvet, edged by flower-beds; from this two shallow flights of steps at either end led down to a shrubbery flanked by rich ferneries and rock-work; and thence was another steep descent, by winding path and step, to what the girls had dubbed the "Lower Depths," which might have been a piece of pure wild woodland, so luxuriant was the leafage there—bushes, trees, ferns and flowers all growing in their natural freedom and untrained abundance. Nothing was allowed to be done in the way of cultivation in the "Lower Depths," save keeping the paths clear of growth, and the removal of unsightly weeds or unsafe branches; thus the picturesque wilderness of these green shades might have been twenty miles from town, while the whole garden was shut in by fine forest trees, so tall and luxuriant that only here and there could the chimney-pots of the adjacent houses be seen.

On one of the fairest days of ripening spring, when the air is balmy and golden with a forecast of summer, a pleasant party were gathered on the upper lawn. Mrs. Percival was enthroned in the most comfortable chair, with Dr. Fitzallan in close attendance. A shawl was spread on the grass at her feet, on which Eileen, who had a kitten-like aptitude for curling herself up on the ground, was half reclining, leaning against Momie's knee and playing with Ray's dog—a large brown pointer, with a coat like satin, and mild eyes full of love and intelligence. Gertrude and Rhoda were lounging on a garden-seat—Gertrude, sedately occupied with some fancy work; Rhoda, happy and idle. The group was completed by Kitty, who had gradually drifted to its outermost edge—Kitty, blooming and lovely in a fresh white dress and pink ribbons, her sweetest smiles dimpling about her mouth, and beamingly content. Her sweetness was not being wasted, for Dr. Barnabas Grey, irreverently known amongst the girls as “Barnacles,” was by her side.

Dr. Grey was certainly no match for fair Kitty in looks; he was rather stout, just below middle height, with plain and sallow features, short-sighted eyes and spectacles, and a chronic line like a frown on his brow, which was, however, an expression rather of intentness than ill-temper. But plain though he was, he had a sweet smile, a big, intellectual forehead, and a thoroughly good and trustworthy aspect—and Kate certainly liked him at present better than any of her other admirers. Absorbed as he was in Kate Dundas, he had yet a little attention and interest to spare for Dr. Fitzallan. Of course he had heard all about the new mesmeric practitioner, and his cure of Eileen; he was not sceptical, for he had himself seen something of magnetism; but while he was not in the least inclined to sneer at the cure, he had not been enthusiastic in his expressions of congratulation. The girls were not at all surprised at this, first, because “Barnacles” was set down in their mental tablets as a quiet, dry, unenthusiastic person; secondly, because they thought it quite natural that he should not feel unmixed delight that a stranger from abroad should step in and succeed where his own brethren had failed—his brethren, not he, for Dr. Grey had no personal interest in the case; he had never been called in professionally to attend the family.

Dr. Fitzallan and Mrs. Percival had been talking of one thing and another, and some chance turn in the conversation took it back to the beginning of their acquaintance, and to Eileen and the improvement of her health.

“She is quite a different girl already,” said Mrs. Percival; “I am sure we ought to be—and we all *are*—very grateful to you, Dr. Fitzallan.”

“The gratitude ought to be on my side, Mrs. Percival; for the advantage is really chiefly mine. It is a pleasure and a privilege to find a subject so gifted as Miss Eileen. She is developing remarkable powers of clairvoyance in its simplest form. It is true

that I have not yet seen any signs of promise of the higher lucidity in her."

"No?" said Mrs. Percival doubtfully and inquiringly. "You mean——?"

"That she has no power of seeing anything more than I *will* her to see; she can tell nothing that I do not know. It is not clairvoyance of the first order. Of course it is possible she may develop it yet, although I can perceive no signs of it."

Eileen was looking up with much interest. "Is it not curious," she asked, "that I don't know anything at all about it? I mean, I don't *remember* anything. When I wake up, it is only as if I had just dropped into a sleep for a few minutes."

"Yes," he said with one of his rare kind smiles, "all that has transpired during your sleep is like one of those dreams which are forgotten on waking. But you may remember what has happened from one dream to another."

"Most curious!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival. "Of course, Dr. Fitzallan, you naturally find the deepest interest of your life in these investigations?"

"Yes," he assented. "I have devoted many years of my life to their study. You see they are important, inestimable, with regard to the advancement of science—that is, of humanity! The true aim of all science is to benefit humanity; to assist in its slow, but sure progress—onwards and upwards. And in this force, of which we only now stand on the threshold of comprehension, there are enfolded incalculable possibilities of good."

"And of evil too," suggested Dr. Barnabas Grey, who had been lately lending an attentive ear to the conversation, and now put in his word for the first time.

"Yes, if the power should be degraded or profaned by falling into evil hands," Dr. Fitzallan admitted. He spoke with his usual strong composure, tempered by a touch of sadness, yet with a certain lofty and exalted confidence that seldom indeed could such a disaster befall. "But the same may be said of many—nay, of all the acknowledged factors in civilization—of steel, fire, steam, electricity. The agent powerful for good is powerful for evil too. Creation and destruction are only different expressions of the same force. Even the very drug that is medicine in a drachm is poison in a draught. The small dose cures, the larger kills. The fruit of death and the fruit of life grow on the same branch."

"And sometimes one may make a mistake in the gathering," observed Dr. Grey.

"True, but even such mistakes are a part of the great law."

"The law of unending conflict and eternal warfare—the forces of good and evil swaying level in everlasting balance—all life preying on life, all existence a struggle without end, without victor and without vanquished."

"Not without end," said Dr. Fitzallan. "The law of life is no purposeless struggle, that stands still and leaves off where it began—no battle for the mere breath of to-day. Evolution is the law of the universe; all life is progress. The forces of light and darkness, Ormuzd and Ahriman, have been in conflict since the world began; but the stars in their courses fight against Ahriman, and the final triumph of Ormuzd is assured."

"You are very fortunate to be so sure of it," observed Dr. Grey.

"How true, and how beautiful to think!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival.

"Yes," Dr. Fitzallan continued, warming to his subject. "Perfect light, perfect truth, perfect good—there is the ultimate goal towards which we all are progressing. There is no real retrogression; the reaction that is apparently a backward movement is only the spring of recoil. The higher emotions develop and grow out of the lower ones. As soul develops from body, so animal progresses to man, man to spirit, spirit to God. Day and night succeed each other, but the brightness of noonday is without a shadow, and in the darkest hour of night the stars and moon break out from behind the clouds. So light conquers darkness; and so we can see typified in every cloudless noon, and every moonlit night, the triumph of Ormuzd over Ahriman!"

Dr. Fitzallan had just arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, carrying his audience—at least the feminine majority of his audience—with him, when the neat-handed maiden, whose name was not Phyllis, but Mary Anne, came across the lawn bearing one of those orange-yellow envelopes which startle nervous people—on catching sight of which the women immediately lost all interest in optimistic philosophy and forgot the abstract in the concrete. Mrs. Percival tore the envelope open eagerly.

"Ah, from Queenstown!" she exclaimed gladly. "They have arrived all right. Due at Liverpool to-morrow morning!"

Her joyful exclamation was echoed by the four girls who clustered round her in delighted interest.

Mrs. Percival was the first to remember that Dr. Fitzallan had his part of interest in the arrival of the "City of Naples."

"And Mrs. Fitzallan is on that steamer? Then the news is good news for you too, doctor. I dare say there is a telegram waiting for you at home," she said smilingly.

"Shall you go down to Liverpool to meet her?"

"That will depend on her telegram. I think in all probability I shall go and meet her at Euston Station."

"Oh, Momie!" cried Rhoda, catching at the idea, "couldn't we all go and meet Geoff and Ray?"

"Well, I think, dear, we should be rather overpowering. You know you would none of you stay behind, and I'm afraid we should be rather like the whole of the 'Pinafore' chorus let loose on the platform."

"And so we should be," cried Rhoda, bursting into the chorus. "For we are their sisters and their cousins and their *aunts*!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Percival, "and I think their sisters and cousins and aunts——"

"And *mothers*!" put in Eileen playfully and caressingly, rubbing her cheek against Momie's knee, like an affectionate kitten.

"Had better stay and embrace them at home," Mrs. Percival continued.

"Well, Dr. Fitzallan, I wish we were *you*," exclaimed Rhoda with a playful pout. "*You* can go and meet your own wife."

"Yes, I certainly have that privilege," he acknowledged; "and I may be graciously permitted to look after the baggage, and hurry up the porters, and attend to all the business."

"You know there couldn't be a happier or pleasanter business," said Mrs. Percival with her sweet sympathetic smile. Momie had not much intellect, but she had a heart of gold; her nature was so "full of the milk of human kindness" that it overflowed even beyond her own family to all her friends and acquaintances.

"Now I suppose you are dying to rush home and get your telegram," exclaimed Kate.

"Dying? Well, I trust I shall not die till I have got it." He smiled one of his slightest, coolest smiles. It occurred to Dr. Grey—a calm and critical looker-on—that the insistence of the family on posing him as a devoted and impatient husband aroused in him a sort of reactionary air of superiority to the mere human emotionalism of domestic affections.

Whether it was that he felt the anxiety they all expected him to feel concerning the telegram which they took it for granted was awaiting him, or whether he fancied himself *de trop* in the happy family discourse, which followed the arrival of the glad tidings, Dr. Fitzallan soon took his leave.

"I think if I had a husband," observed Kitty, "I should like him to manifest a little more delight at the prospect of seeing me after a long separation."

"Perhaps it has not been such a long one," suggested Gertrude.

"Well, it ought to *seem* long to him, anyhow," said Rhoda.

"I suppose they have left their honeymoon a good way behind. Dr. Fitzallan is no longer a young man," remarked Mrs. Percival.

"And not a man to wear his heart upon his sleeve at any age, I should fancy," added Gertrude.

"I should think he was a very reserved man," said Eileen, softly putting in her gentle word. "There is a sort of silent power about him; it's not what he *says*, but one *feels* it."

"Yes," Dr. Grey agreed, "there is something cool and strong and confident, yet reticent in the extreme, in his manner. I fancy he very seldom lets the daws get a chance of pecking at *his* heart."

"He never has any small talk ready," said Mrs. Percival. "He is one of the men who have no small change, but plenty of gold in

their pockets. And he has such true and beautiful ideas. I do like to see that firm and hopeful faith in goodness—in everything turning out for the best."

"Yes, there is a great charm in optimism," Dr. Grey agreed. Then presently he followed Dr. Fitzallan's example and took his departure. Kitty strolled with him along the path towards the gate.

"It always seems to me somehow as if Dr. Fitzallan ought to have been a clergyman," she observed.

"A natural idea enough, as he seems given to preaching," Dr. Barnabas Grey rejoined drily. "That sort of high-flown talk often goes soaring up like a balloon without a car—it takes nothing with it, and goes nowhere in particular."

"Careers vaguely about the empyrean," laughed Kate. "I think that is where Dr. Fitzallan exercises *his* hobby-horse, up above the clouds. I suppose I'm not clever enough to follow him."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Dr. Grey. "You are much better walking steadily here with your feet on the solid earth. Don't let him be mesmerizing *you*, Miss Kate."

"*Me?* He couldn't if he tried. And if he were to try it on any other of us, the next one would be Gertrude. He says *she's* the only one, after Eileen, who shows any signs of possible sensitiveness to the influence. But, if he did mesmerize *me*—" She paused, with a faint deepening of the colour on her cheek.

"Well, *if?*" said Dr. Barnabas.

Kate looked down a little coyly and demurely as she added:

"Why should you wish him not to?"

"It is not a power that I should like to see exercised by any man over—over—" it was his turn to pause and hesitate—"any woman I—I was—interested in."

"And are you not interested in my sister Eileen?" she rejoined reproachfully.

"Yes. As your sister," he said. "But I confess I have some doubts as to the discretion of allowing *her*—and I should be more than sorry to see *you*—placed under the influence of this stranger about whom no one seems to know anything. Where did he study, and get his diploma?"

"How *should* I know?" replied Kate. "I don't know if he's got one at all. In America, I suppose," she added; "he talks of having 'studied' there; and I believe he had a large practice there. How suspicious you are about the poor man! I dare say he's a very good doctor. We all like him well enough. Momie thinks there never was such a man; and he certainly is doing Eileen a great deal of good, there's no doubt of that."

"Well, that is something satisfactory," he replied. "All the same, I am glad *you* don't require to be done any good to."

"So am I. There's never anything the matter with *me*! There is nothing whatever to recommend me as a patient."

"No; that is not a light in which I should have thought of either regarding or recommending you to my brethren," he observed smiling.

They had reached the gate by this time.

"Well, good-bye," said Kate gaily. "Next time you come you'll see my cousins, King Geoffrey and Prince Ray, and you'll find us all in assorted attitudes of adoration."

* * * *

The midday train from Liverpool is rushing at express speed, with thundering rhythm and smooth and steady swing, on its way to London, bearing a goodly number of the passengers who have landed that morning from the "City of Naples."

Amongst these are the Rockleigh party and their friends, in luxurious possession of one of those saloon carriages which are attached to the London express for the accommodation of ease-loving travellers. Lord Rockleigh and General Peyton are deep in a political discussion, which is peaceful and pleasant because they are both of one mind. Lady Rockleigh and the Hon. Algernon Vesey, each with a newspaper in hand, are exchanging notes about the news as they dip into the columns. Lady May Rivers has also a newspaper in her lap and Geoffrey Carresford has two or three; but although they, like the rest, have been debarred for nine days from the luxury of their daily paper, they neither of them seem disposed to make the most of the regained privilege now that it is theirs again. Their newspapers lie neglected; their heads are inclined towards each other; they are indulging in reminiscences of the recent voyage and prospective plans for the remainder of the season. Mrs. Fitzallan, who has been honoured by an invitation to join the distinguished party on their journey up, and Ray Percival are thus left to entertain each other; *he* asks nothing better; and *she* is as placidly and passively willing to talk to him as to any one else—if anything, rather more willing, perhaps, as nine days of constant association from morning to night cannot fail to develop a comfortable "at-home" feeling of familiarity; and in the course of the daily intercourse of the voyage, Mrs. Fitzallan has become pleasantly accustomed to take Ray Percival's unremitting care for her as a matter of course.

The travelling party are all in lively mood. The ordeals of the voyage and the Custom House are safely over; they are all—except Mrs. Fitzallan—in their native land; and however small the smouldering spark of patriotism may be nowadays, yet in some form or another, in greater or less degree, the love of country still burns in every English breast; and there are few things that fan it into a more genial glow than a return to our native island after an absence in far-off lands. So every one is in good spirits.

As to Geoffrey Carresford, *he* has looked from the moment that he strode through the crowd along the wharf at Liverpool, as

if he ought to be saying, "My foot is on my native heath, and my name is McGregor!" His good humour is increased by the circumstance that during the trials and troubles of the landing it fell to his lot to take care of Lady May. All that day she has looked up to him with the most bewitching air of reliance and dependence, morally clinging to him through the tribulations of the Custom House; leaning on his arm with that half timid, half trustful smile, which is so sweetly flattering to mankind, as he piloted her through the crowd, and on entering the saloon carriage motioning him to a place beside her by a slight and to all but him imperceptible glance and gesture, which charmingly implied confidence and mutual sympathy. So Geoffrey is in a gay and happy mood:

"His bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne!

his sometimes cold and stolid blue eyes are bright with heart's sunshine as they meet the Lady May's.

Ray Percival also is ready to talk and laugh; but his high spirits spring really more from a sense of curiously mixed excitement than from pure joy. He is very fond of his family, and glad to be home again; but his pleasure is dashed by the reflection that in his case home, sweet home, means probable parting from his new friend—possibly losing sight of her entirely. In the great world of London it is so easy to drift apart when the desire to keep in sight is only on one side. Mrs. Fitzallan has shown no sign of regarding their travelling acquaintance—intimate though it has naturally been, as such acquaintances always are—in the light of anything like a lasting friendship. He feels that when once this brief little journey is over, she may slip out of his sight—out of his reach.

So much depends on the manner of man her unknown husband may prove to be. Ray has already made up his mind to cultivate his acquaintance if possible; but he knows too well that it may not be possible or practicable. There may simply be a brief meeting in a crowd at the railway station; the husband may take his wife away to his own world—away from the circle of her new acquaintances—away from all the associations of the voyage—out of their sight and their ken for good and all! Ray has ascertained Mrs. Fitzallan's plans and prospects as far as she knows them herself—but this is not very far, very little indeed beyond the day. She is uncertain herself whether their headquarters will be in London or on the Continent—uncertain where they will settle at all just yet.

This uncertainty does not seem to affect Mrs. Fitzallan's serenity in the least. It does affect Ray Percival's; he knows very well that it is, or should be, a matter of no interest to him; he knows he ought not to care; and the consciousness that he *does* care ruffles him. He would like to have her settled in London,

getting intimately acquainted with his mother and sister. Vague visions—vague, but attractive and tantalizing—flit before his mind's eye, of Mrs. Fitzallan as a friend of the family—dropping in to afternoon tea—dining—driving with them—a favourite of his mother's—chatting in sisterly confidence with the girls. This is what he would like—this acquaintance cemented into a steady family friendship. He wants his own people to know her—to know her as *he* knows her—so beautiful, so good, so pure, so true! Desdemona read Othello's visage in his mind; Ray reads Mrs. Fitzallan's mind in her visage. He is sure that it can be none but a beautiful nature that looks out of those clear eyes—that nothing but purity and truth can dwell in a form so fair!

Although they are drawing minute by minute now so near to her husband—that husband seems still to Ray a kind of myth. Mrs. Fitzallan is not the type of woman who seems incomplete without her husband. Nay, to Ray the absent Fitzallan appears in the light of a quite unnecessary and superfluous appendage. If Mrs. Fitzallan is excited by the near prospect of reunion, she shows no sign of it, except that the faintest touch of rose-bloom warms her pale cheek.

"Are you very happy?" Ray ventures to ask her, in a slightly lowered voice. "You have a colour—I never saw you with a colour before."

"Do you suspect I have been celebrating the occasion by a little artificial aid to beauty?" she rejoins laughingly, and the colour proves its genuineness by deepening just a shade.

"No, and I am sure it wasn't needed," he replies.

"Perhaps it is that your climate agrees with me," she observes lightly. "I may blossom like a rose when I've been here a little while."

"I hope you will," he says. "I do hope you'll like England. Dr. Fitzallan will find you looking well, I think—he will be satisfied that we hand you over to him in good condition."

She vouchsafes one of her calm distant smiles, a smile bright and cold as moonlight.

"You have been very kind, and taken very good care of me," she replies with cool and easy gentleness.

"I—I should be awfully sorry if I thought we were going to lose sight of you altogether, Mrs. Fitzallan," he says with a boyish hesitation, his own colour rising. "Shan't we—mayn't we—have the pleasure of seeing you sometimes?"

"I really do not know what my husband's plans may be, or how long we may stay in London," is her answer; and Ray feels himself mildly but effectually held at a distance.

Now the green fields give place to brick walls; the bright blue of the sky pales into that faint, dull, lurid haze which in certain states of the atmosphere broods over the whole of our great city. They are running through the suburbs of London, and the pleasant

bustle of collecting baggage begins. The train enters Euston Station, and as it glides in at slackened speed Mrs. Fitzallan looks out of the window, seeking with an unusual eagerness in her eyes among the scattered crowd along the platform. Ray, watching her, sees her smile and wave her hand; and quickly following her glance, he perceives a grey-bearded man in a light coat, with a soft felt hat slouched over his grey hair, raising his hand in answering signal. Is *that* her husband? thinks Ray disapprovingly; why, he might be her father! Dr. Fitzallan approaches the edge of the platform and walks along by the window as the train slows. His steel-bright eyes fix on his wife's face with a calm smile of welcome; he quietly takes her hand as it rests on the sill; all his spoken greeting consists of that universal and general remark of mankind of the Saxon race on meeting, "Here you are!"

The train comes to a standstill. Dr. Fitzallan, stepping forward to the door, stands by and watches with cool attention as the travellers alight—first the Rockleights; then Geoffrey hands out Lady May; then comes Ray Percival, who turns assiduously to offer a helping hand to Mrs. Fitzallan, but her husband is before him. Dr. Fitzallan receives his wife as she steps on to the platform, and kisses her in a matter-of-course way, with an easy inquiry as to whether she is "all right?" Then he glances round at the group of her fellow-passengers as she turns to bid them good-bye, and acknowledge, in a few words of thanks, their kindness to her during the voyage. Dr. Fitzallan is pleasantly impressed by the names he catches in the course of these brief parting salutations.

Lord Rockleigh, Lady Rockleigh, Lady May!

Then Mrs. Fitzallan turns to Mr. Carresford and Mr. Percival; and her husband's eyes fix keenly on these two as they stand side by side—fine specimens both of English manhood in early prime. He looks at Geoffrey, with his stalwart Saxon physique, his expression of almost indolent good-humour and impassive strength—at Ray, with his brighter, quicker glance, and general air as of higher spirit and warmer blood.

Ray, meeting his glance, acknowledges it by a slight gesture of salutation, and observes to Mrs. Fitzallan—

"Your husband—Dr. Fitzallan?"

"Yes," she smiles, and hastily goes through the form of presenting her husband to Mr. Carresford and Mr. Percival.

Geoffrey acknowledges the introduction by a formal bow—Ray, bent on furthering the acquaintance, with much more *empressé* cordiality. It is Ray who seizes on such slight opportunity of conversation as the occasion affords; but it is Geoffrey on whom Dr. Fitzallan's piercing gaze is fixed; it dwells on his features as if seeking to trace some likeness, some reminiscence, while Geoffrey's cool glance passes over the doctor's face with absolute indifference. Lady May and home divide his thoughts between them; he has none to spare for Mrs. Fitzallan's husband—does not in the least

care indeed whether she has a husband or not! There is little room for making acquaintance in the hurry and bustle of a railway station meeting. The party, grouped together for a few brief minutes, speedily break up and scatter in search of cabs, porters, luggage. The Rockleighs' carriage is waiting. Hasty good-byes are the order of the hour.

"Come, Asenath!" says Dr. Fitzallan, cutting short his wife's farewells to her late fellow travellers. Ray Percival turns an attentive ear. So that is her Christian name! He has been wondering what it was. He has never before happened to come across that Puritan name, not uncommon in New England; and there seems to him a sort of cool sedate sweetness and character about it that suits her well. As the cab that bears him and Geoffrey homeward jolts and rattles through the streets, he is repeating it to himself, and it sounds the sweeter for the repetition.

"Asenath—her name is Asenath!"

CHAPTER VI.

"HOME, SWEET HOME."

"After years of life together,
After fair and stormy weather."

THE welcome that awaited Geoffrey and Ray at the latter's home could not have been warmer if they had been restored from the dangers of a campaign, or escaped from accidents by flood and field. The very cabman smiled in sympathy—having pocketed a very satisfactory fare—as he landed a portmanteau in the hall and glanced at the group of bright, flushed and smiling faces surrounding the returned travellers. Sisters or sweethearts, they were a set of good-looking girls—and how happy they all seemed! and the mother too! One touch of nature makes even those natural enemies, the fare and the cabman, akin.

Now the first excitement of meeting was over, the welcomed wanderers were in the drawing-room, surrounded by their adoring womenkind, and graciously allowing themselves to be made much of and set up on pedestals for domestic worship!

The family likeness between them all came out noticeably when they were thus gathered together.

Geoffrey Carresford and his two sisters resembled each other strongly; they were all fair and comely, and both in feature and figure moulded on full and generous lines; but Gertrude had more of her brother's *sangfroid* of expression than Mary Percival, who was the most animated, as well as the most delicate-featured, of the three. Even the two Dundas girls, with their more Celtic type and dark hair and eyes, had now and then a look that showed they too were of the Carresford blood. The strongest likeness of

all was perhaps that which existed between Ray and his mother. They had the same finely-cut, sensitive lips, the same line of profile, though softer in hers, the same expression, the look of warm and emotional natures, with whom every hour of life was thoroughly lived. No vegetation in existence for these two; no sipping at the surface of the cup! They would "drink life to the lees," drain the draught of joy as well as that of pain. Ray was nearly a head taller than his mother; he had his father's height, and she was very proud to look up at her tall handsome son. He took his colouring from his father too, the fair complexion and brown eyes, the slight tawny moustache and darker brown hair, enriched by a distinct touch of auburn. From his father, too, he inherited the half haughty way of drawing back his head, the broad forehead, and level brows which had a trick of lowering when anything did not please him, thus bringing a somewhat stern and even sullen look over the fair frank face.

"Well, now, how are you all?" exclaimed Geoffrey, pulling himself up and stretching his long limbs, as he stood in the central position upon the hearth and looked beamingly round on his family circle.

"You're all right, mater, I see—you look jolly!" said Ray, filially bestowing his first attention on his mother, whilst his dog Ponto, allowed in the drawing-room as a favour on this joyful occasion, fawned upon his master, mumbled his hand and wreathed himself into the shape of a letter "S" with delight.

"And how's Eileen?" inquired Geoffrey, turning to his little pale cousin, whose thin cheek was much pinker than usual. "Why, Eily, I heard you were ill! You look as fresh as a rose!"

The girl's lips parted in a soft happy smile. Joy had indeed brought a transient bloom and light to her face that made it look as fresh and bright as the rest of those fair and beaming faces round.

"She is so much better for Dr. Fitzallan's treatment," said Mrs. Percival.

"Fitzallan!" repeated Geoffrey; "why, that's the name of Ray's unknown beauty."

"Dr. Fitzallan's wife was expected to cross on the 'City of Naples,'" said Gertrude, while Rhoda retorted laughingly:

"If she's unknown, how can you know who she is?"

"Well, she was unknown for the first few days," said Geoffrey; "then we found out she was a married woman—rather to Ray's disappointment, I think."

Mrs. Percival looked at Ray, who flushed a little and turned his head with an impatient gesture. However, he was given to reddening on the slightest provocation; although sunburnt now, he had one of those naturally fair skins which change colour almost as readily as a girl's. Women have not a monopoly of that some-

times becoming, sometimes vexatious and embarrassing, variation of colour supposed to be a special attribute of the softer sex. Many a big bearded man, older and wiser than Ray Percival, flushes to the brow under a woman's glance. So Mrs. Percival attached no especial significance to her son's heightened colour, though she was interested enough to inquire:

"Is Mrs. Fitzallan young—good-looking?"

"This boy thought so," replied Geoffrey with his wonted obtuse good humour, "but I didn't see much in her. Nice kind of woman enough though, I daresay. She's got lots of hair and big eyes."

"And is she a—*flirty* sort of woman?" asked Mrs. Percival in a tone that betrayed she was ready for disapprobation.

"Flirty!" Geoffrey burst into a laugh of broad amusement. "If you can fancy Mont Blanc flirting! Sort of woman who looks as if she'd got melted snow in her veins—and not very much melted either!"

"Poor Dr. Fitzallan!" said Kate lightly.

"He's not much to be pitied," said Ray quickly, with a distant suggestion of resentment in his tone. "He has a very nice woman for a wife—one of the steady, quiet kind, with no nonsense about her."

This description set Mrs. Percival's momentarily suspicious curiosity at rest. A quiet, steady person, cold as Mont Blanc, must be a safe acquaintance for her dear boy.

"We came over with the Rockleighs," Ray presently observed, and the conversation drifted away from Mrs. Fitzallan, and ran on the Rockleigh party and the voyage for some time; then the subject of Dr. Fitzallan and his mesmeric powers, and Eileen's rapid improvement under his treatment, came up.

"Why, Mary!" exclaimed Geoffrey, evincing that he was in earnest by calling his sister "Mary," instead of by the usual family nickname; "do you mean you've been going in for that tom-foolery with this poor child?"

"You've been having Eileen mesmerized—put into trances, and all that?" added Ray, with a curiosity not far removed from disapproval.

"It has done her a great deal of good," said Mrs. Percival, prepared to take up her lines of defence. "We had tried quinine, and iron, and port wine, and sea bathing; and nothing seemed to have any effect."

"Good beef-tea and mutton-chops would do the girl more good," said Geoffrey stoutly.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, indignant at what she interpreted as an aspersion on her housekeeping. "As if she didn't have all that *too*!"

"I've heard wonderful instances of mesmeric cures," said Ray, "and I've seen some curious things too. There's no doubt it's a real power, but it's a dangerous power to play with."

"That depends on the hand that wields the power! In good hands and used for benevolent purposes, is it any more dangerous than steel or fire?" replied his mother, triumphantly quoting her now usual authority, Dr. Fitzallan.

"Seems to me," observed Geoffrey, "that either it's all humbug and nonsense, or else it's an uncanny kind of thing to have anything to do with."

"You wouldn't say it was nonsense if you had seen it with your own eyes as *we* have," said Gertrude.

"Why must a thing necessarily be uncanny because *we* have only a very imperfect comprehension of it?" rejoined Mrs. Percival. "And can it be used for a better purpose than to cure the ills that flesh is heir to?"

"Eily is ever so much stronger, certainly," put in Kate.

"And Dr. Fitzallan says it *can* do nothing but good; he only holds this power in trust, and for good and kindly uses," added Gertrude.

"And he finds wonderful clairvoyant faculties in Eily," exclaimed Rhoda; "she can see things he holds at the back of her head, and read cards and letters blindfolded!"

"Well, you can all talk fast enough about it, anyhow," remarked Geoffrey. "And the only one who hasn't put in a word is the little one herself. Come, Eily, what do *you* say to it all?"

"I do feel much better," admitted Eileen. "But, you know, I am not conscious of anything at all when I am in these sleeps. I don't seem even to dream. When I wake they tell me I have been talking and answering questions, but *I* know nothing of it—sometimes I can hardly believe it."

"This is very curious," said Ray, looking much interested. "I didn't think we had a gifted clairvoyante in the family!"

"Might come in useful if she could tell us whether Hotspur's going to win," observed Geoffrey; "I say, Eileen, couldn't you give us the straight tip? And here's Ray wants to know about those Brazilian Tramways!"

"You don't understand, Geoffrey dear," said Mrs. Percival. "She can't tell you anything but what Dr. Fitzallan knows himself and impresses on her mind. And I am sure if you could realize how much better and stronger the dear girl is, you would not disapprove of anything that is so much for her benefit."

"Oh, *I* don't disapprove if you're all pleased!" he said, shrugging his big shoulders. "Don't be setting me up as a bogie! I've no wish to interfere—if this Fitzallan's a straight, square-dealing sort of fellow, and can do Eileen good, and *you* choose to sanction it—it's not *my* business!"

"Dr. Fitzallan is a perfect gentleman, and very nice," said Mrs. Percival.

"I suppose we shall see this paragon some time," suggested

Ray, "and then we can judge for ourselves what sort of a fellow he is. We only had a minute's glimpse of him at Euston Station."

"Where paragon husband came to meet paragon wife," observed Geoffrey. "I wonder if he mesmerizes *her*?"

This idea was somehow exceedingly unpleasant to Ray; but he discreetly refrained from any expression of his sentiments, and soon the discussion was broken up, and the family party resorted to their several rooms to prepare for dinner. Mrs. Percival, unable to keep long away from her boy, hovered about his room to assure herself that all was exactly as he liked it—not that there could be much doubt about that, as she had set every detail in order with her own hands, but she could not bear to lose sight of her recovered treasure. Besides, she was conversationally inclined, and had not said out half her say downstairs. She had a host of inquiries to make about Ray's personal health, welfare and experiences during the American tour; these questions settled, she came to the subject of their fellow-voyagers.

"How curious your crossing with Mrs. Fitzallan just while we were making acquaintance with the doctor here! And you all came up from Liverpool together—you and the Rockleighs and Mrs. Fitzallan? And is Lady May Rivers really such a beauty?"

"She's very pretty," he replied indifferently. "And Geoff evidently appreciated her charms," he added, smiling.

"And *you* thought Mrs. Fitzallan so good-looking, did you, dear?" said Mrs. Percival tentatively.

"I do think her very handsome," Ray admitted frankly, with even a little defiant candour; "perhaps not the style that everybody would admire—pale and calm and statuesque. But she's more than handsome—she's a thoroughly nice woman, straightforward and unaffected—an American, but just as refined and well-bred as any English lady," he added with perfectly unconscious Philistinism. "I should like you to know her, mater."

And Mrs. Percival remembered afterwards—though not until long afterwards—that this was the first and the last time that Ray mentioned Mrs. Fitzallan's name in those frank terms of friendly liking and admiration.

"Well," she rejoined, always prompt to fall in with his wishes, "I'll ask Dr. Fitzallan to bring her to see us."

Ray did not look perfectly content with this concession. "Couldn't you call on her, mother?"

"Why, I hardly see how I could, dear, unless she intimates some wish for me to call. But if you want me to know her, darling—if you think she'd be a nice friend for us——"

"She would, I'll answer for it!" he replied promptly. "Do you think I don't know a nice, true, good woman when I see her?"

Whether Mrs. Percival had entire confidence in her son's penetration and comprehension of feminine character or not, she

at least expressed—and probably felt—no doubt of it in this case.

"Well, I've no doubt we shall make acquaintance," she said. "We like her husband so much; he is a most remarkable man—and it is so wonderful, his magnetic power."

"Is it altogether a desirable method of treatment for Eileen, do you think?" inquired Ray.

"I don't think you'll doubt it, dear boy, when you know Dr. Fitzallan. We all feel the most implicit confidence in him."

"Yes, that is evident," he observed.

"It wouldn't be like *you*, Ray darling, to be prejudiced against a man because he has views a little in advance of the old-fashioned, purely physical treatment of pills and draughts. Of course you'll judge for yourself; but I do think and hope you won't disapprove of his method. He has *really* done Eileen the greatest good."

"Well, that's the main thing. It's a little startling at first to find this kind of thing going on in one's own family; but if it suits Eileen—and she's certainly looking very well—I'd be sorry to say a word against it. Indeed, I'm very glad that Dr. Fitzallan is an able man, and has, I suppose, good prospects. Is he going to settle in London?"

The fact was that Ray, although he had a sincere regard for Eileen, was at heart more interested in the prospects of Mrs. Fitzallan's husband than in his cousin's case. He was glad that Eileen was improving in health, still more glad that it should be Dr. Fitzallan who brought about this improvement, and thus created a favourable impression on the family, which, discreetly encouraged, was likely to bring them into contact with his wife. Ray was certainly, under these circumstances, not likely to discourage Dr. Fitzallan's attendance on his cousin, although at first hearing of it he had felt a little vague disapprobation of the proceeding.

Ray had a little unpacking to do before dinner; Geoffrey had none. He lived, or at least had his headquarters, in chambers, although the Percivals' house was a second home to him, and "Geoffrey's room" was always ready for him there. Thus, having no trunks to unpack, nor fond proud mother to hover around him, helping and talking, Geoffrey got down to the drawing-room first; but had scarcely been down a minute when Eileen joined him. She had heard his step on the stairs—she "knew that step all footsteps among"—and hurried in the last hairpin at random, that she might not lose an instant of his valuable, though not very brilliant, and as a rule neither instructive nor entertaining, society. She saw as she entered that she was first in the field, and a smile of innocent pleasure parted her lips. She was accustomed to be to Geoffrey just "one of the girls;" he generally regarded the quartette *en masse*, with almost impartial affection—

almost, not quite! He made rather special pets of Gertrude and Eileen, and to the latter it was a real and a rare treat to get Geoffrey all to herself.

He had taken up his favourite place on the hearthrug, and stood there, big and broad, in the stalwart splendour of his vigorous prime of manhood—a tower of strength he always seemed to Eileen.

A genial kindly smile beamed over his handsome Saxon face as she came towards him. Such a fragile, delicate, little "lily maid" she looked; such a depth of tender radiance shone in the dark eyes she raised half timidly to his! With the flush of innocent joy on her face, the soft, shy, trusting smile on her sensitive lips, she looked for the moment as lovely as her fair sister, the "family beauty."

"Glad to get the plagues of your life back, eh, Eily?" he said.

"So glad! It has seemed such *ages* since you went. It was horrid to have you so far away!"

"Did you think we'd be eaten by grizzly bears?" he laughed.

"One is always anxious about one's own people," she said shyly, relapsing into safe generality.

"When one's a woman, I suppose," rejoined Geoffrey, to whom anxiety about even his dearest and nearest was unknown, unless he had solid grounds for believing them to be exposed to actual danger. "It's very jolly to have one's own people to come back to after all," he added.

It was certainly pleasant to have that sweet, tender, girlish face looking up at him with shy adoration, as innocent and artless as a child's.

"Those who wait the coming rider travel twice as far as he,"

she quoted softly.

"Poetry, Baby?" he asked, with amiable patronage. "Been learning some new poems?" He sometimes called her "Baby" when he was in an unusually affectionate mood; he always treated her as if she had been a little child indeed.

"It is as true in poetry as in prose, isn't it," she said, "that the time seems longer to the women waiting at home than to men out in the world?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. It's the women waiting that make the home though." The idea sent his thoughts flying to Lady May. "Rockleigh had his wife with him on his travels, and his wife's niece too," he added.

"Lady May Rivers? Yes! And is she so very lovely, Geoffrey?"

"That's just what she is—a lovely woman."

"And Dr. Fitzallan's wife—is *she* as pretty?"

"You wouldn't name them in the same breath. You'd as soon compare a—*a* rose to a snowflake!"

"Why, Geoff, it is *you* who are poetical!" said Eileen, with a smile of surprise. Never had she known Geoffrey to plunge so recklessly into simile before, and on the subject of women's charms too! "I should very much like to see these two contrasted beauties," she added.

"I should like you to know Lady May," he said.

The sound of opening doors above warned Eileen that her time was short; their *tête-à-tête* was nearly at an end; she had something she wished to say, and only a minute to say it in.

"I want to see Mrs. Fitzallan too," she began, hastily making that name a stepping-stone, "because of the doctor, her husband, you know. Geoffrey, please tell me. You don't—you don't mind my being mesmerized, do you? Because if you—if you don't approve——" she hesitated appealingly.

"Well, Baby, of course I don't want to put a stop to anything that's for your good. I'm glad to see you so much better; but it's impossible for me to come to any fixed opinion till I've seen and know a little more of this new doctor and his ways of treatment. If I come to the conclusion that it's not wise nor well for you, Eily, I'm sure you won't be obstinate about it."

"I will stop it to-morrow, Geoff, if you say so. Don't I always do what you wish?"

"Yes, you're a very good sensible child, Eily; we've never had any trouble with you."

She smiled gratefully and happily.

Even this moderate meed of praise from Geoffrey was sweet. The mildest expressions of appreciation from him were so rare, she prized them as if his lips dropped pearls.

Then Gertrude came in, her fair sedate face brightening as she looked at her brother; then Kate and Rhoda raced downstairs; lastly Ray and his mother appeared, Mrs. Percival beaming with a possessive air of perfect bliss.

Meanwhile Dr. Fitzallan and his wife were enjoying their first domestic *tête-à-tête* after their temporary separation. He had taken part of a furnished house in one of the west-central squares. It did not look very home-like as yet; the carpets were shabby, the curtains faded; the furniture was stiff and sombre, its general arrangement rectangular; even the pictures on the walls, the large gilt clock on the mantelpiece, flanked by a pair of gay floral-patterned vases, had the unhome-like air of furnished apartments. But a woman's presence seldom fails to stamp something of character almost immediately on any room of which she takes possession; and already the mere presence of Mrs. Fitzallan, settled and at home, with her bonnet off and a flower pinned in her dress, seemed to change the whole atmosphere, and to give a touch of the *home* aspect to the dingy rooms, which were really very clean, as clean as London smoke would permit them to be.

Dr. Fitzallan looked at his wife, and felt that her arrival was

distinctly an improvement on the former situation; there was a certain sense of satisfaction in having her back with him, to look after his comforts and make his residence home. She was a good manager, and would keep things in order. Women had their uses certainly; they were sometimes ornamental too. Although her husband of several years, he acknowledged this to himself as he looked at Asenath, tall and fair and graceful, in her pretty, well-fitting dark-blue dress, with a white rose on her bosom.

"Well, Asenath," he said, laying his hand on her shoulder with a coldly caressing gesture, "are you at all glad to be with me again?"

"Of course I am glad, Gervas," she answered gently but calmly. She looked up in his face and smiled, but the smile, though carefully soft and kind, had no heart-warmth in it. He moved his hand away from her shoulder impatiently.

"Glad!" he echoed. "Glad or sad is all the same to you! Always the same frigid lifelessness! A man might as well have married a snow figure."

"Better, perhaps. *She* would have melted! and *I* am, unfortunately, substantial," she replied quietly. Then she added in a conciliatory tone, laying her hand lightly on his arm, "I do not mean to be cold, Gervas, but you know it is not my way to be demonstrative."

"I should think I did know it!" he said with a curling lip. "Well, I suppose you are as you were born; man can't alter what Nature has made; and after all you may be of more help to me than a snow image could be. Come, now, tell me about your fellow-travellers. That big fair fellow—what's his name?—Carresford; did you see much of *him*?"

"Not very much. I saw more of the other, his nephew, Mr. Percival. He was very kind. Mr. Carresford was always about with the Rockleighs."

"Yes; and now, these Rockleighs? They were civil to you, eh?"

"Yes; Lady May Rivers was especially pleasant."

"I hope you cultivated them, Asenath? Such chances are not to be let slip carelessly. They may be useful to us. We want to make a position for ourselves here; and the acquaintance of people of their class is just what may turn out a very valuable support and help to us."

"I had not looked at it in that light," she observed quietly.

"No, I dare say not," her husband retorted. "You are always utterly unpractical! a curious combination of the unpractical and the cold. Most cold-hearted, unemotional women have cool, calculating heads; but you, with no more warmth about you than a stone, have just as little balance of hard level sense as the most hysterical of puling sentimentalists."

"I am sorry I am of such an unsatisfactory disposition," she said. A moment's silence, and then she sighed—a sudden painful sigh

—and added more hesitatingly, with an earnest look in her large clear eyes, “I wish—I wish we could understand one another better, Gervas! Perhaps we do not either of us do the other justice.”

“I do *you* justice enough, Asenath,” he interrupted. “I admit that you are without one redeeming vice!”

“That is scant justice,” she replied, flushing; “I think you do *not* understand me, and perhaps I don’t really understand you. I only wish I could be sure whether I do or not.”

“Oh, you understand me just well enough,” he rejoined bitterly, “to know that I am not what you want me to be; not cut out exactly on your pattern to suit your delicate fastidious taste, to move and breathe and live and have all my being according to your squeamish scruples. You should not have married mortal flesh and blood, Asenath!” he said, with a flash of fierce and impatient scorn. “You expect a man to be just what you are yourself—a model waxwork figure, animated by the correctest moral machinery!”

She shut her lips and turned away silently. In a few minutes she observed quietly and pleasantly that she had a good deal of unpacking to do, and slipped out of the room. She busied herself over her trunks for some time; but when after an hour or so Dr. Fitzallan came in search of her, she was no longer devoted to the task of unpacking. Weary with the day’s travelling, tired, too, with bending herself double over her boxes, she was sitting in a low chair, leaning her arm on the table, her cheek upon her hand. She had let down her hair to brush, but the brush lay neglected in her lap; she had drifted into a reverie and sat there lost in thought—though it was no day dream of love and joy, of peace and home-coming, in which she was absorbed, so absorbed that she hardly heard her husband’s step in the passage; this, however, was not much wonder, as he habitually moved with a tread as noiseless as a panther’s.

“Tired, Asenath?” he said.

“A little,” she admitted.

“Why don’t you look up at me when you speak to me?” he inquired; and putting his hand under her chin he raised her face. Something was shining suspiciously about her long eyelashes—something she had not had time to brush away.

“Your eyes are wet,” he observed. “Have you hurt yourself? or have you the tooth-ache? Nothing else would make *you* cry.”

“Then I suppose I have the tooth-ache, though I was not aware of it,” she replied quietly.

He looked at the loosened hair which streamed over her shoulders. No light feathery locks like rippling sunshine were hers; but heavy sombre waves of seaweed brown.

“Do you remember that poem of Browning’s, ‘Porphyria’s Lover,’” he said abruptly, “where the man twists all the woman’s

hair round her neck and strangles her with it? Your hair's long enough and thick enough, Asenath," he added with a curious slow smile, gathering the soft, abundant brown tresses together in his hand. "I could treat you like Porphyria, couldn't I?"

She showed no uneasiness at the grim form of jesting which some weak sisters might have found unpleasant.

A little pink flush crept into her cheeks; a shadow of a smile curved her lips; her grey eyes looked up steadily, fearlessly, into his, which were fixed on her with a kind of sinister gleam.

"I like you better so, Gervas," she said, "than when you are bitter and sarcastic with me!"

"Because you know very well that I shall not hurt you," he rejoined; "unless—unless some day you provoke me too far."

(To be continued)

FROM BIKANIR TO BAGDAD.

A HOT WEATHER JOURNEY IN 1888.

FEW people in England, I fancy, know much of Bagdad even from books, and fewer still have visited the place, so perhaps my first impressions of it may be of some interest. I say advisedly my first impressions, for they are so much sharper and clearer cut than those that follow, which are inevitably mixed up and dulled by one's daily surroundings and the ideas gathered from others, that before long it is impossible to say which are one's own ideas and which are those unconsciously assimilated.

I will begin, however, from the beginning and describe our starting point and journey, and although to the many travellers of these days the latter may seem trifling, still it took us four weeks to accomplish, and those four weeks comprised some of the hottest days of an Indian hot weather, so that it was no trifle to me even after twenty years of eastern life.

If few people know Bagdad I may safely assume that fewer still have heard of Bikanir, a district which in maps usually occupies a blank space, described vaguely as the desert of India. But though few know the place by name, thousands must have seen and admired the beautiful red, black and gold lacquered screen of Bikanir work which formed one of the attractions of the Indian annexe in the Colinderies of 1886. Personally, I felt an intense interest in that work of art, having watched its development from the earliest stage when the first drawings of it were spread out in our verandah for the "Mem Sahib's" gracious approval, until it appeared a thing of beauty in the exhibition. Bikanir is the most northern of the states of Rajputana and is immediately south of the Punjab and Scinde. During many months of the year I am bound to admit that the term desert is fitly applied to it, but a very few inches of rain suffice to transform the yellow sand into a prairie of long waving lovely grass, which during three or four months feeds thousands of sheep and large herds of cattle. Having lived in Bikanir for two years and seen much of the country, and having taken a very deep interest in all its concerns, I have a real affection for its vast plains and miles of low rolling sandhills, although until lately I thought it was undoubtedly the very ugliest spot on earth.

Rumours of a line of railway through Bikanir are now afloat,

but at present there is not even a road, and our journey of 150 miles from the capital to the nearest railway station in an adjoining State was performed in a carriage drawn by six camels, which were changed every ten miles.

We started on the night of the 25th of May, a day on which the thermometer stood at 115° in the shade. A brilliant full moon enabled us to dispense with the usual flaring, evil-smelling torches, which two men riding in front on wretched ponies carry on iron prongs strongly resembling Britannia's trident. Our camels had been sent out ten miles, and that distance we traversed rapidly and in great state, the carriage being drawn by ten horses, so that I imagine our feelings were somewhat akin to those of the people who drive a circus into a country town. The number of horses was on account of the heavy sand to be driven through, and as it was, we were all but turned over in a high drift and had to get out and walk over it while the ten horses plunged and kicked and tied themselves into knots in the effort of backing out and climbing over the drift some easier way.

Even a good camel does not attain to much speed as a beast of draught, and four miles an hour was a fair average. Oh, those six weary nights, shall I ever forget them? We started about 11 p.m. and went on till 3, 4 or 5 in the morning, and in spite of travelling only at night the heat was excessive and the burning wind hardly abated. We were fortunate, however, in not meeting with what we were in nightly dread of, namely, "ādis," or sand storms, which are frequent at that time of the year in these plains. During an "ādi" the wind suddenly rises with tremendous force, carrying with it dense clouds of sand and whirling them round in all directions, making it nearly as dark as night in the middle of the day. When travellers meet these storms the only thing to be done is to lie down and cover up the head, and we often discussed the probability of our having to do this.

The carriage was arranged for lying down, and we had goodly store of pillows, but of what avail were they when one's progress was one continual jolt, bump and lurch, and when every man of the six camel drivers was engaged in urging on "my brother," as they call their animals, at the top of his voice, and with a large expenditure of energy in whacking the unfortunate creature? I used to hope that the blows fell chiefly on the harness, and I believe they did; anyhow it is the custom of the camel driver never to remain quiet for a single instant, and the head man, who as it were led the yelling chorus, became absolutely hoarse and unable to speak by the second night. Sleep to me was out of the question, although my husband managed to secure a fair amount, and was positive that if I only lay still as he did, I should sleep too. The feminine head is, however, made of different materials, and the jolting that seems to lull a man to sleep, gives a woman a racking headache. By day we lived in very small rest houses built for the use of

travellers, but the heat in them was too great for any rest or comfort. One day we passed in the palace of a native nobleman, who did all in his power to make us comfortable, but the rooms were tiny, and the heat even greater than elsewhere. I was amused at my bath here, which was prepared in a tall brass cylinder, the original use of which I could not imagine. On arriving at the railway we were "trolled" over the Sambhur salt lake at four in the morning, and how I enjoyed those two hours! After the jolting of the camel carriage it was the very poetry of motion, and in future I shall cherish with affection the remembrance of that hard uncompromising iron seat.

We were two nights and a day in the train going down to Bombay, an experience which gave us a new insight into the nature of heat. We spent the whole day sucking ice and putting wet handkerchiefs on our heads, and on that of our little dog, who I think would have died but for this care. As we reached Bombay in the earliest dawn, a vision of a brilliant flush of red made me sit up and look out, when I found it was caused by our passing at the little stations trees of the Gold Mohr or *Pomeiana Regia* in full flower, quite covered with their splendid flame-coloured blossoms. Bombay is full of these lovely trees, and I almost forgot the misery of the oppressive ante-monsoon heat in the pleasure of driving out and seeing them. In the early evening one tree would light up a small street by its brilliant colour. In Bombay our constitutions had at least such benefit as could be derived from a change in the quality, if not the quantity of heat. Up country it was of the fierce dry burning sort, here it was of the dense moist windless kind; and as it is the vanity of Bombay to believe firmly that in such a delightful climate punkahs are superfluous, except just at meals when of course the coffee or soup may make you hot, our two nights there were spent in misery instead of sleep.

From Bombay we resumed our journey in a small British India mail steamer, the "*Purulia*," of 1,500 tons. It was very rough during the 48 hours we took to reach Karachi, and as all the ports were closed, it was absolutely impossible to remain two minutes below, for the heat was stifling; so the other ladies and I lay on deck, and by degrees got over our sea-sickness. The boat was very crowded, and the whole deck at night was covered with passengers mixed together in the most promiscuous manner, without any attempt at dividing the ladies and gentlemen; but the ladies at any rate were far too miserable to think of such trifles, and none undressed or troubled themselves as to what was going on.

We landed at Karachi, and drove some miles to the military station, which struck me as being a very bare, desolate-looking spot, on sandy desert-like ground. We were most kindly entertained by the Director of Telegraphs, and I much admired his very

pretty garden and plant-houses, which showed what could be done even in such an unpromising soil. On leaving Karachi and all except one other European passenger behind, we encountered a rough sea for about 18 hours; but after this we had none to complain of, and could devote such energies as remained to us in abusing the heat, and endeavouring to find out the coolest, or rather the least heated portions of the deck. Our feelings came to a crisis next day at Muscat, in whose harbour it was our fate to be anchored for a night and half. Words fail me to describe the heat there; I only know it fairly frightened me, and I did not dare to sleep, for an attack of heat apoplexy seemed the most likely thing in the world to occur. I quite sympathized with the view of an Arab passenger, who said to my husband: "Muscat is a city of the devil." To show that my fears were not groundless I may mention that only two nights previously the heat had been still greater, and an officer and several men of H.M.S. *Turquoise*, lying at anchor in the harbour, had died of it, while many men and officers were still on the sick list. Two young middies came on board for the ship's mails, and we felt so sorry for English boys to be exposed to such a climate. There was no air, and it seemed as if one could not breathe the intensely heated atmosphere. How thankful I was when our anchor was weighed at one the next day, and how devoutly I wished never to see again the semicircle of black barren rocks which forms the harbour of Muscat.

Bunder Abbas was the next stopping place; there we met the out-going steamer for Bombay, and posted our English letters. It is on the Persian coast, and does not look interesting, being very barren and desolate, with one long row of mud houses along the beach. Singah, the next port, is rather prettier, with a background of hills and a long fringe of date palms. From there we crossed the gulf in a rough sea to Bahrein on the Arabian side, where the celebrated pearl fisheries are. The islands are so low one cannot see them until the steamer is quite close, when a dense line of date palms gradually appears. H.M.S. *Ranger* was stationed here, and one of her boats was at once sent off to us for the mails; but, unfortunately, these had been left in Muscat in the care of the captain of the "*Turquoise*," as the "*Ranger*" had been expected down in those parts, so there must have been great disappointment on board. From Bahrein we re-crossed to Bushire, on the Persian side of the gulf. We landed there in a small steam launch, and spent the day very pleasantly with the kind and hospitable wife and family of the Resident, who was himself absent, to our great regret. In returning on board the "*Purulia*" in the evening the sea, which had been like oil in the morning, was most unpleasantly rough. The way that little cockleshell of a launch jumped and rolled and tumbled over the big waves was most disagreeable to a timid sailor, and I was very thankful to find

myself once more on the deck of something larger and more substantial.

The only first-class passengers remaining on board the steamer besides ourselves, after Muscat, were six Arabs; one the Sheikh of Kowait, and the others horse dealers of those parts returning from Bombay. We all had to sleep on deck the whole of the voyage, for when I put a thermometer in my cabin one evening, thinking the heat something above the average, it marked 112° ; and at first I did not fancy our having to share the saloon hatch with two of these men, but I was really agreeably surprised to find what thorough gentlemen they were, so I soon became quite used to them, and thought nothing of it. They had no disagreeable habits, and never stared at you or made themselves unpleasant in any way. The sheikh was a well-bred looking man, with good features; but the others were of a commoner caste. One or two of them were very particular in going through their prayers at the appointed times, and did so even when it was very rough, and the constant getting up and down from their knees required in Mussulman devotions must have been a work of difficulty. They were most civil, and made us a handsome present of Turkish delight and splendid mangoes, and on one occasion I was asked to take a cup of their coffee. It was very nasty, being immensely strong and flavoured with some spice; but happily there was not much of it, and I think and hope I got it down without allowing the muscles of my mouth to lapse into the expression of disgust they were endeavouring to form. The day after leaving Bushire our Arabs departed, several boats coming about 40 miles from land to meet and take them off. It was amusing to watch the greetings when their friends came on board; every one kissed every one else—not French fashion, on the cheeks—but well on their thick and moustached lips, with a good sounding smack. The sheikh, however, was greeted in more respectful fashion—his followers knelt and kissed his hand and rubbed their heads against his arm in a cat-like manner. Our steamer was now anchored at the bar, and we had to wait until the tide rose and we could float into the mouth of the Shatt-el-Arab, as the river formed by the union of the Euphrates and Tigris is called. This was for many miles very wide, and the low banks were hardly visible; but gradually it narrowed, and we became aware that we had really left the sea. By-and-by we passed the solitary telegraph station of Fao, and on stopping to land the mails we heard the sad news of the death of the Emperor of Germany, which had taken place the previous day. In this melancholy fashion we resumed our connection with European affairs, a subject which I think the heat had nearly driven out of our minds.

It is quite curious, by the way, to note how very engrossing a subject heat is. When it gets to a certain point, one is always turning it round so to speak, and looking at it in every possible light, and

anxiously inquiring into every one else's experience ; in fact nothing but a strong cool breeze suffices to turn the attention elsewhere. Personally, I am prepared to put up patiently with an atmosphere of 90° in the house, after that I begin to protest and think longingly of the delights of 72°, which to some people I know in England is a very fearful experience indeed.

By ten at night the river was much narrower, and both banks were lined with date palms. On passing Mohamrah, on the Persian side, our steamer fired a gun by way of salute to the sheikh of the place, and soon afterwards we anchored a little below Busrah for the remainder of the night. At dawn we steamed on to the port, for the town of Busrah is two or three miles from the river, up one of the many creeks which open out all the way along, and there we had to remain one day in quarantine. We landed the next morning, and spent the day with the consul ; at least, I passed it on a bed, having a slight attack of fever from, I suppose, the change of climate, for Busrah is a damp, unhealthy place. In the evening we said good-bye to the very pleasant and amusing captain of the "Purulia," who had done all in his power to mitigate the severities of the weather and to keep up our spirits. But in spite of his efforts, I think the only individual who really enjoyed the voyage was our little fox-terrier, Tip ; as in the early part of it he killed five rats, and the rest of the way he spent all his waking hours in sniffing about for further victims, while in default of finding them, he one day caught and shook to death a remarkably fine cockroach—which seemed, however, to disagree with him. We afterwards went on board the "Kalifeh," one of the fine river steamers which run weekly between Bagdad and Busrah, taking with us a small addition to the family, in the shape of Tot, a very pretty little wife for Tip, who had been given to us during the day. The consul most thoughtfully insisted on sending on board the very comfortable spring-bed on which I had been lying during the day. I thought this almost superfluous at the time, but when the Bagdad form of bed dawned upon me, I did indeed feel grateful, especially as I was more or less ill all the way up the river. To enjoy a Bagdad bed a person should be comfortably stout or gifted with unfailing powers of sleep. It is all boards, and the mattress is just an afterthought ; in fact, for natives of the place a small mat covering the boards is all that is thought necessary, but to an individual so conservative as to have even retained a kindly feeling towards feather-beds, and whose gifts in the matter of sleep are small, it is an object of unmitigated horror.

We steamed up during the night between banks thickly lined with date palms, and about four in the morning stopped at Kurnah to take in bales of wool. This is the confluence of the two great rivers, and here tradition places the site of the Garden of Eden. It is so flat and ugly that I cannot believe it, nor was this impression the least shaken when a branch from the "Tree of the Knowledge

of Good and Evil" was presented to me. I have always pictured that tree as a lovely one, with beautiful tempting fruit growing on it, but this was only a bit of a "sirrees," a common Indian tree with no fruit at all, only long, dry seed pods, which rattle in the hot winds with the most irritating sound. The Garden of Eden *must* have been beautiful, while this part of the world is certainly not so; and as all evidence is in favour of no great change having come over it, I decline to believe in this site, and have at once and for ever gone over to the theory that the North Pole was the real cradle of the human race.

The distance from Busrah to Bagdad by river is 500 miles, although the real distance is only 300, but a glance at the map will show what extraordinary turns and twists the Tigris takes. The sun is consequently sometimes in front and sometimes behind or at either side, and one cannot sit in the same place on deck for ten minutes at a time. I experienced great disappointment on this voyage. I had hoped to see a well-cultivated wooded landscape, but alas! the reality showed me a flat, absolutely treeless, uncultivated waste, for at least 400 miles up the river. Never again will I do Bikanir the injustice of saying, as I have so often done, that no country could be uglier. It did its best, it had no river, not the least little streamlet in all its length and breadth; its wells are 250 feet deep and more, yet every village had fine and sometimes beautiful trees, and the prospect in parts was diversified by numerous sandhills, while Mesopotamia, with this splendid river running through it, is a barren plain. The one country has, so to say, the ugliness of nature, but this has the far greater ugliness of neglect. We passed numberless Arab encampments on the way up, wretched-looking places with the most forlorn huts of mats and grass, or occasionally the ragged black Bedouin tent. The inhabitants seemed suited to their abodes, and looked half savage; indeed, clothes were evidently not considered by all to be necessities of life.

The navigation of the Tigris is a difficult matter, for the quantity of sand it brings down is always causing new shoals and altering the set of the current, so that the whole 500 miles has to be learnt and studied as Mark Twain describes his study of the Mississippi; only in this case I think it must be even more difficult, for there are absolutely no salient points to fix the memory. The banks of the river are very low, and after sunset, when both sky and river partook of the same pearly hues, they gave one the impression of being merely a line ruled on the sky. Occasionally we passed a little town, a collection of mud huts with a Turkish fort; and at one of these, where no steamer had called for some months, the whole population came down to inspect the boat, many of them wading into the water to get a nearer view. I noticed amongst the dark skins some very much fairer women and children, with really dark red

hair, not the least caroty red, but the darkest chestnut red—a shade, in fact, I had never before seen.

On the fourth morning, Friday, the 22nd of June, we passed very early the ruins of the Arch of Clesiphon, the sole remaining monument of two great cities, Clesiphon and Seleucia, on either side of the river. This I hope to see by-and-by, but cannot describe here. Afterwards the excitement became great, for in an hour or two we should be at the end of our long journey, and in the world-renowned city of the caliphs. The banks began to lose their desolate look, and there were gardens and date groves, and even occasionally a thicket of willows; while by-and-by houses began to appear, the country houses of the rich people of the city. The river here makes an immense bend, and on rounding it I was told Bagdad was visible. All I saw at first was a very unromantic-looking factory chimney, with clouds of black smoke coming out of it; this I subsequently learnt was the bakery of the Turkish soldiers; but by degrees minarets appeared and a long broken line of houses on our right; on our left, groves of date palms interspersed with houses, and in the distance, a bridge of boats. The steamer stopped opposite our new home, I and the mails were quickly landed, and our voyage was a thing of the past.

IMPRESSIONS OF BAGDAD.

To the newly-arrived resident in Bagdad the Tigris is undoubtedly the great feature of the place. It is a splendid river—broad, deep, and even now, when it is comparatively low, with a very swift current, which increases at flood times, I am told, to seven knots an hour. It is of a yellow, tawny hue, due to the quantities of sand it brings down, but this mixture, I fondly hope, acts in some way as a disinfectant; for I shudder to think of the otherwise polluted condition of the only drinking water in the place. All refuse of every description is simply thrown into the river. I have already casually observed the unpleasant corpses of two dogs and a sheep floating down; and at first I could not reconcile myself to drinking the water; but when filtered it is clear and even remarkably good. Since I have arranged to have the water used in this house taken from the middle of the river, where it is far cleaner and the current is strongest, and also to have it boiled before filtering, my mind has not dwelt quite so much on typhoid fever.

The traffic on the river is curious and interesting; the chief means of transport is the "gouffa," a boat of most peculiar construction. It is perfectly round and made of osiers neatly bound together and then covered outside with a thick coating of bitumen. It bulges out all round in the middle, and the top part turns slightly over towards the inside, and is used as a seat by those who do not either stand or sit at the bottom. Occasionally I observe a chair or stool used in a gouffa by a superior kind of

passenger. Many of our nursery stories are said to come from the East, and the instant my eyes fell for the first time on a gouffa, I felt that here was the evident origin of the rhyme so well known to children: "Three wise men of Gotham went to sea in a bowl," &c. For Gotham, substitute Bagdad, and the thing explains itself; for here the wise men, and doubtless the foolish also, do go in a bowl every day, and have done so for centuries past. Occasionally, I hear, the bowl is over-weighted and sinks to the bottom.

But the gouffa suggests to me a still older and more classical story. It is inferred from modern research that the Greeks borrowed the idea of the Styx and Charon from the Assyrians; and to any one seeing a gouffa being paddled across the river in the dusk of the evening by a figure standing up dark against the sky line, it is a matter of instant belief that the ancient fable is being enacted before one's very eyes.

A sight that has not yet ceased to cause me surprise is that of a large Arab boat, filled with neatly packed firewood till it resembles nothing but an enormous stack, dragged by main force up the river and against the stream for several hundred miles by the unfortunate crew, about seven in number, who take the work in turns. A long rope is fastened to the top of the mast, and to this the men are harnessed with broad bands of plaited straw which go over their chests. They take, I am told, six weeks to come up to Bagdad, so it is evident that time and human labour are not of much account in these parts.

There are many bathing places along the river, one indeed very close to our garden; and bathing and swimming go on from the earliest dawn until darkness sets in, but the noise seems greatest in the afternoon and evening, when the bathers are chiefly boys, who evidently enjoy themselves most thoroughly, always taking advantage of any Arab boat which may be anchored alongside the shore to climb up as high as they can amongst its spars, and jump into the water, doing this over and over again. In the early morning you see twenty or thirty men crowded together in a gouffa, and after getting into the middle of the river they jump off one by one and swim long distances, the gouffa following and picking them up if they are tired. We hear those who bathe are chiefly Jews.

The river is always a pleasant sight, and gives an idea of coolness on the hottest day, though practically it makes little difference in the heat; but in the evening it is really lovely. The sun sets behind the bridge of boats in a glory of red and yellow, and soon grey pearly tints show themselves along the line of water, to be succeeded as night draws on by the long lance-like reflections of the lights in the opposite houses and on the bridge; or perhaps the moon is lighting up everything, and turning the tall date palms and more especially the mud houses and walls to a

beauty certainly not their own. The atmosphere is so clear here that the number of stars visible and the brightness of them is quite remarkable. It is little wonder that the Chaldeans of old turned their attention to astronomy, with this marvellous moving panorama ever before them. The Milky Way is especially brilliant and on a dark moonless night one sees a distinct reflection of it thrown across the river.

I often see lights floating down the river in the evening, and find it is a Mahommedan custom, when any one is ill, to fasten a candle on a piece of wood and put it on the water; if the light goes out quickly the person will die, but if it keeps in as long as the turn in the river enables you to see it, he will recover. I wonder if the candle ever receives a gentle hint to extinguish itself quickly, by being put on insecurely or crookedly?

I must now go on to more prosaic matters and endeavour to make my readers understand something of this curious place. Our house is very centrally situated on the river, with the city behind and at each side; in fact it is so enclosed that I feel rather like a prisoner, for, unless obliged to do so, no lady would wish to walk in the streets, and to get into the country, or desert as it is called here, without doing so, the river must be crossed. There is, however, a long narrow strip of garden on the river front between it and the house in which are three rows of tall orange trees, and which like all gardens so situated here is called "*mesaniah*;" and across the road behind is another larger garden where there is a tennis court. In these two gardens my personal interest and amusement will chiefly centre, and as the soil is excellent and water abundant, I fancy anything in the way of flowers and vegetables can be grown with ease. I have visions, which are already beginning to take practical shape, of a smooth green bit of English lawn under those orange trees and of beautiful *Maréchal Niel* roses from India, which will add their perfume to that of the orange blossoms. There is plenty of fruit in Bagdad, or rather in its neighbourhood, but it greatly needs cultivation. There are grapes of all kinds in abundance, some quite equal in size, shape, and colour to English hot-house fruit, but without its flavour. Then again, the nectarines have a fine flavour, but there is nothing of them to eat, they are almost all stone. I often think what wonders a good Scotch gardener could effect here with this abundance of water, fertile soil, a climate to ripen anything, and the original of almost all fruit trees to work upon.

The house is a large native building in two divisions, each surrounding a court-yard, the inner one having been the harem. It contains many rooms of all shapes and sizes and on various levels; the greater part of these are empty. On the ground floor are the "*sirdabs*," semi-underground rooms much used by Bagdad people in the hot weather, but these unfortunately are out of repair and too damp for us to inhabit, although they are used as offices. The

room I have chosen for my own use is a most curious specimen of Bagdad ornamentation; the ceiling, and half-way down the walls, are composed of pieces of looking-glass arranged in geometrical designs, while the lower half of the white walls is alternately composed of a small recess and a square of looking-glass. I may mention that the quality of the glass is such, that no feminine occupant of the apartment in question would wish to look at herself twice. One end of the room is entirely glazed from the ceiling to half-way down the walls and the other end looking on the river is of lattice work which can be closed by shutters. The heat in this, and indeed in all the rooms, is far greater than in any forcing house I ever entered; in fact during the four hot months the house is absolutely uninhabitable. We never go into it except to dress, and are obliged to live entirely in two little rooms called "chirdakhs" built in the garden close to the river, which have an arrangement for cooling them. This consists of one side of each room being filled up with lattice work on which camel-thorn is fastened and kept constantly wetted. This is a substitute for the sweet-smelling "cuscus" grass used for the same purpose in India, and a poor one it is, as it does not retain the moisture and smells like the strongest senna tea. The heat of Bagdad is intense during July and August when the dates ripen, but after that we hear it will gradually cool down and we may expect many months of delightful weather. The heat appears far more severe than in India, because there our houses are built with a view to resisting it and keeping it out. Here the idea seems to be to take in the heat and make the most of it, to cherish it and never let it go. The court-yards are just wells of heated air which any cool breeze has the greatest difficulty in penetrating, while the sun pours its rays down on them the whole day long. There are two peculiarities in Bagdad houses painful to a stranger; one is the immense height of the steps of the stairs, which in some instances are twice the height, and in others quite a third higher than what one is used to. Until I came here I never knew how fondly one's nether limbs cling to the traditions of their youth. The other peculiar feature is the lowness of the doorway, which causes a person "great of stature," as a rustic in England described the rather unusual height of a young lady friend of mine, to receive many blows on the head until experience has taught the necessity of abasing oneself.

In Bagdad every one sleeps on the roofs of the houses during the hot season, indeed it would be quite impossible to sleep inside. Early rising is consequently less a virtue than a necessity here, and 5 o'clock, on which I have decided as a happy medium, is considered quite a late hour to be in bed by the more experienced European inhabitants, who rise at three or four and go out riding or boating. For the greater part of the summer it is cool and pleasant at night, but during the very hottest season the nights

are terrible, and I find that the unpleasant sensations I have experienced of fluttering at the heart and a difficulty in breathing, are very common even amongst the natives themselves.

Bagdad has one super-excellent manufacture which does much for the comfort of its inhabitants during these dreadful nights. A particular kind of light-coloured clay found here is made into vessels of various shapes and sizes to contain water; it is slightly porous, and the effect of putting one of these vases out in the burning wind is to cool the water in it nearly as well as ice could do, so that in the hottest night the poorest person can secure a deliciously cool draught. Ice also is obtainable, and is the greatest comfort. The roofs are not only used as bedrooms, but in the evening visitors are received on them, and many people dine on them, but the lights attract so many insects that I think it is preferable to dine in the "chirdakh." I mentioned that there was a road at the back of the house. The first time I crossed it I looked upon it as merely a dirty bye-lane, so my astonishment was proportionately great on learning that it was the principal and the widest street in Bagdad! I have since then walked through other streets to return some calls, and perceive the truth of the above statement, difficult as it was to believe at first. The streets here are simply filthy alleys or gutters, being frequently considerably depressed in the centre. We measured the width of an ordinary one and found it six feet, while the blank walls of houses on each side were twenty or thirty feet high. This narrow space is crowded with people, and donkeys, and men on horseback, and many dogs, alive and occasionally dead or at the last gasp from disease. If the donkeys are large and white they are usually ridden, if small and black they have enormous bundles of grass, or wood, or what not laid across their backs, and absolutely fill the streets, so that it is necessary to flatten oneself against the wall or take refuge in a doorway. We are always preceded and followed in the streets by men to clear the way before us and keep people from riding over us behind, and this is a necessary precaution. There are no carriages in Bagdad except one belonging to the pasha; every one walks or rides. Until late years I believe no Englishwoman went into the streets without veiling herself in Turkish fashion, but now one's dress excites little remark. The word *veil* conveys an erroneous notion to the English mind, as it conjures up the idea of something thin or transparent. The garment the women here cover themselves with is a sheet rather than a veil in our sense of the word; among the better classes it is of a heavy make of silk, generally in two colours, often white and gold, and very handsome and expensive, while the poor women wear dark striped cotton things of the same description. A gauze veil or thin handkerchief is worn over the face and the sheet is drawn over the head and pinned to the head-dress. This latter is peculiar, and consists of a sort of bright coloured cap, or sometimes a hand-

kerchief fastened tightly over the hair, which is plaited in two tails and hangs down the back. The Jewesses wear a piece of black buckram, which falls over the face in the street, is thrown back in the house and is particularly ugly and ungraceful looking. They also wear long light-yellow leather boots. The dress of the men, except those who affect European-cut clothes, is a long white or coloured cotton dressing-gown reaching to the ankles; this crosses in front and is kept in place by a belt. These belts are rather a speciality of the place and some are very pretty. One's servants and respectable people generally wear a shirt, with perhaps an embroidered front, and trowsers under this; but the poor people are content to dispense with, at any rate, the shirt. The fez is usually worn, except among the Arabs, who have their own peculiar head-dress of a folded coloured handkerchief bound round the head with a thick rope of camels' hair. Indoors the ladies of Bagdad wear a very pretty garment called a "hashmi," which is at once simple, cool and graceful. If this is transparent it is worn over a kind of glorified night-dress, the bottom of which is trimmed like a petticoat and the neck and sleeves perhaps worked with gold thread, but a thicker one could be worn over anything. I see in my favourite paper, *The Lady*, that a Bond Street dress-maker has been introducing a novel form of tea-gown, modified from an Arab design, so this may possibly be some form of the "hoshmi."

Arabic is of course the language of the country, and I must say it is not one which commends itself to the ear; it is so harsh and guttural, and the tones of voice used are such as lead one frequently to suppose that a fight is imminent, although probably nothing but the most amiable sentiments are being expressed. I have had visits from some native ladies who only spoke Arabic or Persian, when of course an interpreter is required, but some speak French, and as there are now several girls' schools taught by French nuns, that language will become more general amongst the young Christian women. At all visits it is customary for black coffee, in the tiniest doll's cups, and sherbet, to be handed round; to men cigarettes and pipes of different kinds are also offered.

There is one great drawback to a residence in Bagdad, namely, that with few exceptions every one sooner or later suffers from the Bagdad boil, or date mark, as it is sometimes called from the fancied resemblance of the scar to a date stone. All children born in Bagdad get it and usually on the face, but older people coming here are rarely attacked there, but have it on their hands, arms or legs instead. A bad one lasts from one to two years and though unpleasant to look at is said not to be especially painful. There is no remedy for it, and indeed the best plan is to leave it quite alone. I am told there are two distinct varieties of this boil, distinguished by the Bagdadis as the male and female kinds. The male sort comes as a red swelling, gradually increases in size and

after some months goes off without any particular trouble ; the female boil on the contrary is of the most vicious kind, and develops into an open running sore very difficult to heal. Nothing is really known of the cause of these boils ; one theory I have read is that they are the outcome of the accumulated unhealthiness of any city which has been originally built on the site of an older and probably equally populous and unsanitary one. Any way, I take it, they are one of nature's protests against the concentrated filthiness common to eastern cities ; and, also, no amount of care and cleanliness in one's individual personal premises can shield a European from the effects of this chronic disregard of sanitary rules. Bagdad is also subject to visitations of the real ancient form of plague, and so lately as eleven years ago thousands died of it. From these facts I am inclined to the belief that Bagdad holds the proud position of supremacy in the widespread kingdom of dirt, though doubtless many other eastern towns could make a good fight for it.

In referring, however, to such subjects as the plague I feel that I am going beyond my original intention, and had better bring these remarks to a close ; merely reminding my readers that they are really and truly the first impressions of what I have personally seen and heard during the six weeks I have been here, and that I make no pretence to deep research.

Q U I T E T R U E.

By MRS. J. H. RIDDELI,

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE GEITH," "THE SENIOR PARTNER," "MITRE COURT," ETC.

ACCORDING to the time-table our nearest station is but nineteen and a half miles from London.

The compilers of that intricate publication, which professes to give accurate information, not merely about our local line, but also our main, our adjuncts, the Metropolitan, the daylight route, the North London and some wild "Will-o'-the-Wisp," which leads travellers around Merton Abbey, are surely greatly mistaken.

They must mean, if not 1,950 at least 195.

Yes, that is it. We are a hundred and ninety-five miles from London down in the remote county of Middlesex. We might be in the wilds of Cornwall, if Cornwall have still any wilds; we might be able to chase deer with Katerfelto in Devon, if Devon have still any deer and any of Katerfelto's progeny are still living; we might be still digging up the pots of silver and gold with which this neighbourhood was once and possibly is now so lavishly bestrewed; we might, even at this present time of writing, have all the rare birds, all the lovely flowers, all the ferns, simples, moths and butterflies of which civilization has bereft us, for indeed civilization has done nothing for the district in which these lines are penned except cut down our trees and hedges.

No more gallant shows of white hawthorn, no more blackberries for the children, no more wild briony with its brilliant berries, no more hops or nightshade; nothing but the dead bare level dear to the hearts of farmers, who of all men except perhaps gardeners have the least fondness for anything picturesque.

For the rest, civilization has left us as dark, dirty and lonely as heart can desire.

Make no mistake, I do not desire to be in the least less dark, dirty and lonely; I would rather wade through mud, do without light, live the life of a hermit for ever, than see the jerry builder with his accompanying army of incompetent workmen take possession of those fields over which larks still sing, where grass still springs, where sheep-bells still tinkle, where weeds still defy the march of progress, where red poppies still flaunt among the corn, and cardamoms and buttercups still deck the meadows ready for the scythe.

The land is not yet "ripe," to use an auctioneer's phrase, to grow a crop of dreadful gardens, villas, terraces; but it would be instantly if we were lighted, paved, sewered, watered.

"A long day, my lord—a long day," I cry. Even with prostrate trees and shorn hedges may it last my time.

In summer or in winter, in sickness or in health, in joy or in sorrow, in wealth or in poverty, God's country is to my mind as infinitely preferable to man's town as I believe Heaven is to earth; once upon a time the country was not lonely, and it can scarcely be charged as a crime to the country that it is desolate because the inhabitants who once made it gay have migrated to town.

In my hamlet the resident families of any position may be counted on one hand and still leave some fingers to spare; we have no church, till lately we had no post office, it goes without saying we have no telegraph; but we had one shop and of course one public-house, called "The Goat;" and surely never before did that animal prove so attractive.

To it the youth and age gravitate as though drawn by a loadstone. There politics are discussed; there most extraordinary ideas are broached, thence marvellous notions evolved. In my ignorance I formerly imagined the sole attraction a tavern possessed was unlimited beer. Observation, however, has satisfied me that drink, though no doubt an important factor in the business, is not by any means the only one.

There the poor man, if possessed of or in the way of earning if only a penny, receives as cordial welcome as Mr. Shenstone himself probably ever found at an inn. The faces he sees are cheerful perforce, for how could a surly landlord ever expect to succeed? In the tap-room there is in the worst of weather and hardest of times a glorious fire; as a rule he meets the—in his estimation—best of good company, because they tell the stories which amuse him most and talk of persons and affairs which interest him keenly. Everything is bright, clean and orderly, there is no stiff conventionality, but on the other hand there is no riot and, best of all, there are no women.

It is his club—entrance fee a penny cash or credit. There he takes refuge from the unswept hearth, crying children and too often nagging wife. There he has full liberty to carry his mid-day meal and eat it in peace; there he can discuss and settle to his own mind the affairs of the nation. To him the tap-room seems a free and pleasant country, frequented by wits and controversialists, by local *flâneurs* and men conversant with burning social questions. The members of the Athenæum or Army and Navy or even the Garrick have not yet half so much for their money, and yet Sir Wilfrid Lawson and his followers would close these centres of intellectual activity and substitute taverns devoted to tea and coffee, beverages which in any rank do not lend themselves to brilliancy of conversation or originality of thought; Sir Wilfrid's

originality being only the exception which proves the rule. It is not given to every one to be witty on cold water.

Here in Middlesex, merely that trifle of one hundred and fifty miles from London, which we reach in about the time we could travel down to Rugby, at an expense which would suffice in the excursion season to take us to Hunstanton and back, we are very original and primitive. If St. Paul came back to earth, he would never persuade our village financiers, politicians and gossips that Her Most Gracious Majesty does not pocket all the Queen's taxes—which none of them pay, by-the-by—that an exhibition is not to be held this year in Hyde Park; that a tower is not about to be erected near London, from the top of which people will be able to see all over England, "because"—kindly notice this "because—the nobility have so much money they are bound to spend it some way;" that the *Times* has not still evidence to produce which will change the whole Parnell case; that there is not a great canal being cut at Bristol, with many more conceits of the same sort it might prove tedious to mention.

This is my hamlet; these, with the honourable exceptions which might be counted on those few fingers previously mentioned, are its inhabitants. My modest cottage stands hard by this primitive Eden. Before I took possession it had stood in its present position, open to all the winds of Heaven, which have not been evicted yet. It was the most neglected, tumble-down place I ever elected to take and I am fond of neglected, tumble-down places. When repaired, painted, papered, made generally habitable, they lose half their charm.

Where, for instance, is that wealth of forget-me-not which once made the old garden a reflex of the blue sky; where the violets that carpeted the moss-grown walks; where the periwinkles which made the heart glad even in mid-winter; where the wealth of daffodils which cast a glitter of gold over the earth; where all the wild things which bloom in their season with such lavish profusion? Alas—and alack a day—there are no bouquets to be culled at Christmas now as there were before the rake and hoe cleared a way through the tangle!

Having reduced the weeds and made the house weather-tight it seemed to me that I might rest awhile—but it did not seem so to my friends.

To them it occurred that I ought to let the cottage. Against this idea I turned a passive resistance for more than three years; but at length I was over persuaded. I am not prepared to say that it was not a good thing—I only knew I did not want to let the place, and hugged myself into the belief it never would let.

The rooms were low; the rooms were small; the furniture—well, it was not such as a gentleman with a large balance at his bankers' would order from a fashionable upholsterer. There was no

tennis lawn—there was nothing such as people want now-a-days. Nobody would want it——

Did they not, though. I could have let it over and over—but I closed with the first offer, and Providence being very good to me, secured most charming tenants, who speedily transformed themselves into kind friends.

Most people when they let their houses go away. It is a capital plan; but where would have been the profit had I followed their example?

Going away in my case would have meant saving at the spigot and spilling at the bung with a vengeance. No, I did nothing of the kind; I merely having let the "New Farm House," aged about 150 years, retired into the old, the age of which no man knoweth. How many people lived in it in the old forgotten times I cannot conjecture; I only know that at present one person, myself, is greatly pressed for room.

The whole house contains but five small apartments, a scullery and a hall.

In this abode I bivouacked last summer—in this abode I am bivouacking still—for, not content with my first experiment, I must needs paint the lily and let the modest cottage again for the winter to a tenant who though not so much charmed with the house or the locality as my friends, of last summer, wishes to remain till the autumn. When I retake possession I shall proceed to grapple with and exorcise the various winds which have been whistling up the staircase and along the passages since I vacated the premises.

When night falls—when the village children are fast asleep—nothing more utterly still than the old farmhouse can be conceived. If one began to think about it the silence might be felt.

As I write not a sound breaks the stillness save the gas in the coals. Even the Japanese geese are mute—a rare event—and the ducks are indulging in their first sleep.

Silence wraps me round; the only other dweller in the house has long since bade me good-night and I am as quiet as if I were in that hut on the Yorkshire moors for which I am always longing.

The other night the house was just as quiet when a pull at the bell broke the stillness.

The outer door was fastened as it usually is at dark; but I undid it and holding a lamp aloft beheld a coachman in the neighbourhood who has always accorded to me a dignified affability for which I feel grateful.

This individual, who I think has somehow missed his vocation, for if appearances go for anything he ought to be an archbishop—carried a large volume and a paper—and before I could get my breath said:

"I beg your pardon for troubling you, ma'am; but Mrs. Henry Boston is coming to England and——"

"It is rather early for her," I remarked as he paused.

"She's coming, ma'am, as you'll see; she has sold her paper, *The Graphic*, and is going to buy up *Current Interest* here."

I was dazed—he came upon me in the middle of a paragraph. I was like one wakened from sleep and for one wild minute it crossed my mind that in a spirit of the purest philanthropy he had walked round to give me the earliest intelligence of what he thought might prove a great chance for an impecunious author.

Happily I did not commit myself for I never was more mistaken during the whole course of a life in which I have been many times mistaken.

"Pray come in," I said, for he was still standing on the step, where had it been summer roses would have drooped over him.

He did so and went on, "I thought you could give me advice, ma'am. I have six volumes of *Current Interest*, and if they would be of any use to her——"

I felt I was rapidly going crazy. What did the man mean? What on earth did he want? The lamp I held was of the dimmest description and threw but the smallest light on the subject.

"You had better come in here," I said leading the way into a small room which my visitor's portly person seemed to fill.

"I knew you would give me advice on the matter, ma'am," he said with excited eagerness. "There is the paragraph," and he pointed to a few lines in *The Night Express*, a much crumpled copy of which he had put in my hand while we stood in the outer gloom.

I asked him to be seated, and going over to the light read, "that Mrs. Henry Boston having sold her illustrated paper for 400,000 dollars, £80,000, was coming to England to purchase such organs of current interest as she might select."

There was a lordly ease about this which surprised me a good deal, but it possessed the merit of enlightening me as to what was passing in my visitor's mind and the knowledge astonished me much more than the paragraph.

"You see that, ma'am."

"Oh, yes, I see," I replied.

"Eighty thousand pounds—four hundred thousand dollars is eighty thousand pounds?"

"I suppose so," for indeed eighty thousand pounds seemed to me near enough.

He looked up at me anxiously waiting for the advice which was to secure him some share of all that wealth (I wonder what amount he expected to receive) and I stood looking down on him considering how I could best say he had found a mare's nest.

I gazed at his fine head, large enough to have contained sufficient theology for a bench of bishops; his curly grey hair so carefully arranged; his wonderful moustache, which, starting from each side of his mouth wandered in a graceful curve downward to

his white cravat, and I really felt very sorry that mine should be the hand to dash such a cup of promise from his lips.

"If I understand you rightly," I began, "you have six volumes of *Current Interest*, which you thought Mrs. Boston might possibly buy?"

"Yes, ma'am; you see they're no good to me and she might as well have them."

"But even if Mrs. Boston were going to buy *Current Interest*, and the *Night Express* does not say she is——"

"You have not noticed, ma'am. If you would read the passage again," he interrupted.

"I have read it," I said, and the absurdity of the whole affair would have been too much for my gravity, but for the sort of vexed feeling one has when forced to disappoint a child. "I don't in the least know what is meant by organs of current interest; but I do know that *Current Interest* is not one of the papers meant. Even eighty thousand pounds would not buy any leading London journal," and then I thought that perhaps the *Night Express* might consider the present time favourable for Transatlantic energy to purchase *The Times*.

"Do you think not, ma'am?" he asked, questioning not my last statement, but my first. "Perhaps you are not acquainted with *Current Interest*?"

"I know it very well," I answered, glancing at the big volume he was affectionately nursing.

"There is a little of everything in it," he went on, "a little of all sorts. I daresay your name, ma'am, is in it somewhere."

"I daresay."

"And if Mrs. Boston would like the six volumes."

"You mistake," I interposed. "Even if Mrs. Boston were to buy *Current Interest*, she would not purchase secondhand volumes; she would buy what we call the copyright. Suppose, for instance, she took over the *Illustrated London News*; she would buy the right to produce and publish it; to carry it on in fact (how hard it is to explain literary matters to outsiders), but she would not buy old odd volumes from persons who might chance to have them."

"Would she not, ma'am?" and his tone told me that although he was still incredulous his castle in the air was vanishing away.

"No," I told him very decidedly, and then as I could not bear to see his disappointment I was weak enough to add: "If you have any old books you want to get rid of, you might let me see them; perhaps I could buy some."

His face instantly lighted up; this time I am sure with the hope of making his fortune.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "I was in ten minds to bring round a Latin grammar by a namesake of yours—the Reverend Mr. Riddle."

Now a Latin grammar is no doubt a most useful and excellent

work, but as it cannot be regarded as of much assistance in novel writing, or even pleasant viewed as light reading, I hastened to produce a volume on Old London I picked up in Lambeth Walk for threepence, in order to show the sort of thing likely to find favour.

"Ah!" he remarked, "I know London well."

Touched on my tenderest point, I incautiously answered: "And so do I."

"Do you, ma'am?" he said; and no words can convey an idea of the pitying tolerance he managed to throw into that question.

His incredulity, I am bound to say, was not without reason, for my knowledge of his London, new fashionable, suburban London, is indeed by no means exhaustive.

After that he descended to particulars. He had lived twenty years with a foreign gentleman resident near Hyde Park, and was good enough to explain how his name ought to be pronounced.

Then he, my visitor, not the gentleman with the foreign name, took a lodging-house—two, indeed, I fancy—and came signally to grief.

Whether lodgers failed to take rooms, or whether they failed to pay, I did not gather; only one thing is certain—a sheriff's officer appeared on the scene; in the language of the poet,

"A whirlwind from the desert came,
And all was in the dust."

"Even to my daughter's piano," he finished.

No wonder, poor fellow, he wanted to sell his six volumes of *Current Interest* to Mrs. Boston. That entertaining publication had no doubt come into his possession after the minions of the law departed.

About this time it being borne in upon him that I knew what I was talking about, and that his chance of going shares in Mrs. Boston's £80,000 might be regarded as infinitesimally small, it struck me he waxed somewhat bitter on the subject, for he remarked:

"Ah! they make a lot of money out there and then they come over here and marry poor dooks."

It occurred to me that our "poor dooks" generally go out there when they want to marry a lot of money; but perhaps he knows more about such matters than I. Happily we were drifting further and further away from those six volumes of *Current Interest*, and he felt able to tell me he could have taken service with a certain "dook," but his wife would not let him.

I did not see why he should not have closed with the offer, and said as much, but was crushed by the reply, "People think so badly of him."

He referred also to a duchess who likewise hungered to possess him as coachman, but as his wife again intervened, objecting apparently even more to the lady than she had done to the gentleman,

he drifted down into these wilds—which is a great pity, for his appearance would grace any sphere, and his sweetness is quite wasted on the air of our desert hamlet.

By this time he had risen and stood at his full stature. He is of a just and convenient height. He did not go immediately; instead, he took a slow and comprehensive glance round the room.

I watched him curiously as his eyes wandered from the scattered sides of "copy" on the table to the tattered volumes in the book-case, and wondered what in the world he was thinking about.

I soon knew. There is no incertitude in great minds. There was none about him.

"And you sit here, ma'am," he remarked at last.

It is always well to extract a compliment from the most unlikely utterance if you can; but in this case it was not possible. Conceit itself could not have transformed the sentence into—"This is the shrine where genius dwells. Here those books are indited which thrill hearts wherever the English language is spoken!"

Of course I should have liked to take all this out of his simple words, but his tone had so utterly crushed me that I could only answer:

"Yes; I sit here."

"All alone?"

I could have informed him that, on the whole, it is not easy to write novels, say in a crowd; that it is the nature of an author to seek solitude, but the appalling silence struck me so forcibly I merely repeated his words:

"All alone."

"And you are not afraid, ma'am."

"I am not afraid," I answered.

I wonder how many hundred times I have been asked that question. It puzzled me once, but it puzzles me no longer.

Most people are afraid of being alone with themselves; they dread having those questions thrust upon them which underlie our daily life; they fear with an exceeding fear, greater even than their horror of burglars, facing the truth that some day they must go to their long home, and that the windows shall be darkened and the doors shut, and life ended for them and not for another.

"I could not do it," said my visitor, evidently convinced that what he could not do it must be wrong for any one else to attempt, after which confession he went out into the darkness, carrying his volume with him, and leaving me to recover my senses as best I could.

P. S.—If this paper should meet the eye of Mrs. Henry Boston, or any other lady or gentleman desirous of adding six volumes of *Current Interest* to her or his library—there is even the chance of my name being somewhere in the letter-press—I shall be most happy to negotiate the purchase.

A QUICK THING.

By A. N. HOMER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN HE LOVED," "RED RUIN," ETC.

THERE was no denying it, Charles Piers Mostyn, of H.M. regiment of light horse, was ill at ease. At one moment he would burst into wildest merriment in response to some very poor jest uttered by his fellow *voyageurs*, and the next his blue eyes wore a far-away expression, and he would give vent to an audible sigh. How was this? since his surroundings were calculated to put fresh life into any man, no matter how old and careworn, and yet Charlie Mostyn looked glum despite the fact that the sun shone brightly upon his twenty-one summers. The scene was the fair river Thames, and he was sprawling full length in the stern-sheets of the boat which his two brothers were endeavouring to scull up stream against a strong current.

"Look ahead, Charlie, or you'll have us smashing into that canoe," sang out Bertie, who was stroking and had seen the danger only just in time to escape a collision.

"All right, old boy; you go on. I'll mind the yoke lines, never you fear," but the words had barely left his lips before the boat's head narrowly shaved the overhanging bank as they rounded a sharp angle in the stream. To Bertie's intense disgust it was only an adroit use of the boat-hook which saved them from a foul.

"Hang it, Charlie, you come and row; a paddle before dinner will do you good. Eh! what do you say?" he ventured to ask.

"Not much, thanks; very comfortable where I am," was all the answer Charlie saw fit to give.

"Well, you are a jolly muff. Why, man, it's as good as a play to watch your face only for five minutes, you might have eaten something for lunch that didn't agree with you. I wish I were in your place, that's all I can say."

For a few seconds Charlie turned his blue eyes towards the speaker and contemplated him steadily, whilst the tobacco in his briar-root pipe became red as a glowing cinder, but he said nothing and once more fell to thinking. There was, in reality, one very good reason why he should be serious, for it was his last night under the old roof which had sheltered him during the whole of his short life; and in the quiet stillness of the autumn twilight he could not help wondering whether he should ever return to the peaceful home of his childhood, or whether, like many another, he

would go forth *into* the world to die, where no woman's hand could soothe *his* anguish and tend him in his last moments. Each *stroke* of the oars brought to view some well-known object which recalled so vividly the past that he fell to wondering how it *was* he had never noticed the points of interest which chained him to the vanished years, until he was in danger of losing them perhaps for ever. There was the opening to the backwater, half-hidden by overhanging willows, in whose depths he had angled for certain monster fish, and he well remembered the very last time, when he had hooked and played and finally lost one of fabulous strength and weight. There, too, was the old boat-house, damp and overgrown with weeds, and near at hand a certain pool where he had learnt to take a header in real good style, and no thanks to any one. Beyond, and standing a few yards back from the bank, was the old ale-house, which did duty as a first-class hotel, and upon whose creaking sign-board, in gaudiest colouring, was displayed something startling and awe-inspiring in the shape of a ferocious-looking leopard in the act of springing upon an equally fierce-looking man arrayed in hunting-shirt and moccasins of wondrous design. Many were the times he had sat within those hospitable red-brick walls and enjoyed in security the soothing weed and mild ale which stringent orders at home forbade him. A hundred yards further on was the trimly-kept lawn which surrounded his home. Down to the river's edge stretched the smooth greensward, emerald in hue, save where the bright tints of the autumn flowers broke it up into patches. Ah! it was a home he might well feel dubious of quitting. Arrayed against such thoughts were a whole host of romantic visions which his boyish heart had conceived and dwelt upon. Without them he would not have been worth his salt as a soldier, or anything else. Even as the boat touched the landing place, and he led the way in silence towards the house, a proud smile curled his lip and a feeling of exultation stole into his heart. He was to join the colours at Portsmouth on the morrow. His regiment was under orders for the East, and what might that not portend? Fancy pictured to him at that moment none of the grim horrors of war. There were no groans and shrieks of the dying—no whiz of the hurtling shot—no rattle of the withering musketry—no roar of the furious cannonade. The pallid countenances of the dead were changed into strong and hearty soldiers, willing and ready to follow him to death or victory. The glittering decoration had been won and fastened on his breast; ah! dare he hope it—the glorious V.C. itself. And what soldier in the English army would not brave all for that? But a last dinner is always gloomy or made hideously unreal by forced gaiety, and somehow those about Charlie seemed ill-disposed to make the time pass by a display of merriment they were far from feeling. Facing him sat his kind old mother—the only parent left to him, for his father had been

cut to pieces fighting at the head of his regiment whilst still one of the youngest colonels in the service. Charlie Mostyn came of a good plucked race, but he was none the less a man because a big lump would rise in his throat as he gazed into her eyes and saw that they were dim with tears. He knew how she loved him, and those calm sad features, framed by the white widow's cap, would haunt him often in the future. He suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to smoke, and pushing back his chair he passed out on to the lawn unchallenged by a soul, for even the youngest, Gerald, a veritable imp of mischief and thoughtlessness, knew and respected his reason for leaving them so abruptly. Charlie strolled down to the water's edge, and standing in the shadow of a willow, with his back against its trunk, puffed steadily at his knowing little briar, and felt—well, just a shade out of sorts. What prettier scene can be pictured than a dear old-fashioned English house, covered with vines and flowering creepers inclosed in its own luxurious grounds where every flower-bed is a variegated study of rich colouring; the beauty of the whole enhanced by the deep-hued cedar tree and rustling ilex, whilst its boundary is the peaceful river rippling on-wards towards the sea. The home where he had first seen the golden sunlight had never seemed so beautiful to him as now, Charlie thought as he dashed what was very like a tear from his eyes, and gazed upward into the blue vault of infinite space where the twinkling myriads of stars glittered and the harvest-moon rode in her pale glory. He had just lost himself in trying to imagine each globe of light above his head a peopled world, when his attention was again diverted by a sudden blast of wind and the gleaming white of a boat's sail. Another instant and a sharper gust had swept over him, and at the same moment a piteous shriek for help assailed his ears. The next his coat was off and he was in the water fighting with the tangled stems of water-lilies that twined about his legs and threatened to drag him down. The weeds grew thick just there, but each second delayed might jeopardize a life, and he came of a race who had never lost a victory from indecision. "Bring the boat, you fellows. Help!" he called out once, but the night wind blew the sounds of his voice away, and unheard he gained the centre of the eddying stream. Before him, dead ahead, but borne down like himself by the strength of the current was something white floating on the shimmering water. A few strokes more and he could see it was a woman's dress. One powerful effort and he was close at hand.

"Courage; God help you!" he exclaimed as the white object disappeared, but rose again to clutch him with a frantic grip. The face and form was that of a girl, younger even than himself; but in the few brief seconds which passed before he threw his strong arms about her, memory stamped those pale moonlit features indelibly upon his brain. To swim fully clad and, moreover, with boots on is heavy work, but add to that the weight of

another and the difficulties are increased a hundredfold. Charlie turned and swam back again; for the shore he had left was the nearest to hand. And then came a terrible struggle in his mind when moments seemed years of agony. Should he let go that helpless form and save himself, and the whispered answer "never" trembled on his drawn lips. A few more weakening circles with the one arm that was free, and then came a sense of safety as though his work was accomplished, and Charlie Mostyn was unconscious. How long he remained so he never knew. When he next opened his eyes the familiar pattern of the wall paper which decorated his own cosy chamber danced before them, and a dreamy sense of comfort stole over him. Subdued rays of shaded lamp-light filled the room, and the blinds were closely drawn. The hands of the time-piece pointed to midnight, and Mrs. Mostyn sat there smiling and thanking God in her heart for the safety of her son.

"Is she safe?" he whispered.

"Yes, safe and well, Charlie. You are the one who suffered most; but you must be quiet and go to sleep, those are the doctor's orders, my darling."

For a few moments there was silence between them whilst Mrs. Mostyn flitted about the room intent on arranging everything for his greater comfort. At length Charlie was roused from his lethargy by feeling the cold nose of his pet fox-terrier "Snider" thrust lovingly into his hand, and the action was quickly followed by a low whine, meant to attract his attention.

"Good dog, down," he murmured as the animal fawned upon him. "Mother," he added as he suddenly raised himself bolt-upright in bed.

"Yes, dear, what is it? I thought you had fallen asleep again. Now come, like the good son that you have always been to me, try and compose yourself and to-morrow—" but the bare thought of what that morrow would bring was too much for her, and sobs choked her utterance. "To-morrow," at length she continued, "I will tell you all that has happened. But you stand in need of a good night's rest, and the doctor——"

"Oh! hang the doctor——"

"But, my boy——"

"Listen, mother. Where is she? The girl I saved, you know," he added explanatorily, as the blood surged into his brown cheeks and his eyes sparkled with excitement, "and who is she? Come now, you must tell me all you know to-night, or old Hodges' stuff will be worse than useless."

"You were always a little self-willed, Charlie, but I am very anxious that you should rest. Do try and curb your curiosity to-night. I will turn the lamp low and leave you to sleep."

"Take me at my word, mother, if you love me."

That last appeal is always a straight road to a mother's heart,

and Mrs. Mostyn was not proof against it, so she sat down by his side again and clasped his hand in her own.

"Well, my boy, you were carried up here drenched and unconscious, and I was in such misery about you that I never left your side. The lady, whoever she may be, was well cared for; Whilkes was with her. And she drove away——"

"Did what, mother?"

"She left here more than an hour ago. Why, Charlie, you startle me with your vehemence."

"Gone, and no one asked anything about her, mother! **Why, I shall never forget her face as long as I live. But there, what a fool I am. I am weak and out of sorts to-night. Kiss me, and leave me to myself.**"

Mrs. Mostyn did as she was bidden, noiselessly closing the door behind her, and Charlie Mostyn was alone.

"No trace. No clue, and I am leaving England to-morrow. My luck, my luck," he murmured.

Ten minutes later there was a gentle tap at his door. "Mr. Charlie, if you please, sir."

"Yes. Come in."

"I was to give you *this* from the lady as you saved, sir."

Charlie's hand clutched a small parcel eagerly. "Thanks. Any message, Whilkes?"

"No, sir. I said as you was goin' abroad, and the lady she was hurried like——"

Somehow every pulse in Charlie's body was set wildly beating at that moment, and he longed to be alone, but he controlled himself.

"All right; good night, Whilkes. Yet stay, have you mentioned this to any one?"

"Not to a soul living, except yourself, sir."

"Very good. You will find a sovereign on my dressing table. You understand me, say nothing."

Whilkes gave a discreet nod, did as she was told and vanished. Before the door had well closed the flame in the lamp was smoking and threatening to break the chimney, and Charles Piers Mostyn was staring fixedly at a miniature set in a gold locket ornamented by a coronet in rose brilliants. That night and the next day passed, but the sun that gilded with its setting rays the dog vane and the quaint hands of the clock in the church tower of the Thames village, coloured the bistre-tinted sides of the great troopship that headed down Channel with Charlie Mostyn and his regiment on board.

* * * * *

Weeks and many months had fled. There had been a huge mass meeting in Hyde Park. Opinions had been aired and thrashed out lustily by lungs and tongues that seemed to tire not, but at length the mob showed signs of dispersing, and as it broke

up, a tall straight figure strode leisurely away in the direction of the Stanhope Gate. It was Charles Mostyn in flesh and blood, only looking browner and bigger than of yore, but with the laughing smile that used to curl the corners of his good-natured mouth changed for a more serious expression. And the eyes, ah, there was no mistake about them; they had known disappointment and trouble.

"Half-past three. The deuce! Why did I waste my time listening to these people? I shall miss the chief. Here, cabby, are you engaged?"

"No, sir."

"Then drive to the War Office, sharp."

The old house up the river was still in the possession of the family; but it had been given over to another *régime*. The white widow's cap and the kind, calm face of Mrs. Mostyn was no longer to be seen presiding over the morning meal, or flitting happily amongst the summer flowers. Death, the great leveller of all distinctions, had claimed her, and she had gone to her long rest by her husband's side in the shadow of the church tower, whose bells had rung out her marriage chimes, and Charlie was lord and master now. His face wore a grave, almost stern expression, as the hansom bore him along. He had been mentioned favourably in dispatches, for one or two plucky things he had done; and he was daily expecting to be ordered away on an important mission. He had brought nothing back with him from the East, where he had sweltered under a fiery sun and exposed his person recklessly to danger, but *honour* and the—well, the *gage d'amour* (as he loved to think it), and the two were enough for him. Time and tide wait for no man, and least of all officialism, so Charlie was in a state of bewilderment. He had cudgelled his brain in vain for a loophole of escape from his present position; for seriously he felt he was capable of doing anything rather than leave London just at that moment. It was true, he had been in town some weeks, but never once had he set eyes upon the giver of that precious *souvenir* of the cold water bath, which had so nearly ended tragically for him. Therefore the time had been lost, he told himself, for he had come home free, having been proof against all feminine wiles, and as he believed desperately in love with a myth born of a dangerous admixture of unsatisfied curiosity and romance. But now there was a chance of meeting her if he could only remain in town, for people were flocking up for the season. So ran Charlie Mostyn's thoughts on that bright spring afternoon, and to think with him was to act. He had just determined in his own mind that *somehow* he *would* remain in town, when his attention was attracted by—the thing that with one exception he loved best—a horse.

"By Jove! there goes a beauty," he muttered, as he bent his head to peer out of the window. Slowly the bright chestnut

which had aroused his admiration forged ahead, until for a moment the victoria, between the gaily-painted shafts of which it proudly stepped, was abreast of him. A young and well-dressed lady was the sole occupant. What caused him to start so violently and to exclaim in audible tones:

"It is her! It is her! Pull up, cabby; or at least—no, follow that victoria and——"

His voice was drowned by oaths, threats and expostulations. He had arrested his driver's attention to some purpose, for while he was peering into the hansom, trying to understand what instructions were being issued for his guidance, he had contrived to foul a growler on its way to Paddington; to run into a veritable pandemonium of fat old women, children, baths and band-boxes. There is a piteous sight that few men are hard-hearted enough to look upon with composure—a woman in distress. A nervous old lady was screaming at the pitch of her voice, to the accompaniment of swearing, threats and the plunging of the cab horse. Charlie was down in a moment though anathematizing his bad luck, with the result that in five minutes the four-wheeler was once more under weigh, and the faces of the occupants were wreathed with smiles.

"What a nice gentleman."

"And how handsome."

Were the sounds that smote upon Charlie's ear as the door closed and they rumbled away on their dusty journey. But no remarks *could* have been oily enough to soothe the troubled waters of Charlie's spirit, as he gazed down the empty street, and became alive to the fact that the victoria with its fair freight had disappeared. In vain he drove round one corner into a square, right across it and then anywhere that his knowledge of the locality and perseverance could suggest. All trace of the smart turn-out was lost. And so, late for his appointment and considerably disturbed in his mind, he was forced to wend his way to the War Office. When he issued forth again, the weighty conversation, the careful questioning and the string of instructions to which he had been subjected were a kind of dream. For the life of him he could not have repeated any portion of the discussion which had taken place. It was true that, unknown to him, the wiseheads had wondered and commented upon his absent manner and his brief unstudied replies. They were unaccustomed to such scanty traces of homage. And yet he was a man of mark, a dashing officer, whose brains and sabre were to be relied upon, and so he had been permitted to leave the gloomy precincts of officialism armed with a bundle of important dispatches and an order to proceed at once to Paris. Now this was the very step he was not prepared to take. After a well-cooked dinner at his club, his digestion aided by a bottle of good claret, he solemnly decided that—come what might—even though it cost him his commission,

he would not leave London that night. A well-cut profile, a softly-moulded chin, a stately head with a wealth of gold-brown hair, caught up under a knowing little hat, and where is the ambition of the opposite sex, and what mad act will they not commit to look again upon such a picture? They have a lot to answer for, those beauteous smooth-skinned Hebes, who destroy with a glance and spread death and destruction with a laugh and a wave of their dimpled hands. All the same Charlie had no strong argument to plead in favour of his sudden heedless decision, for the lady of the victoria had not even looked at him. But the glint of the gold-brown hair had been enough. He had a card for an "At Home" at the house of a great lady, a *lionne* of society, and thither he went. The gardens were ablaze with light, and a thousand coloured lanterns shot their many hued tints on the moving forms of the richly-clad guests. The air was heavy with subtle odours, and the soft night wind scarce stirred the huge fronds of the palms, whose tall stems towered side by side with the marble pillars of the portico. It was getting late as he touched his hostess's hand and then moved slowly on midst the crowd of gaily decked fashion, the sea of bright and changing faces—looking for one. With a wistful expression on his kind fearless face, he made his way through that moving mass, acknowledging the greetings of those he knew by a bow, a careless nod, or a cheery word. His patience was tried, but his perseverance conquered at last.

"De Vere, who is that lady?"

"Why, man, are you dreaming?"

"Not in the least; never more wide awake."

"And you mean to tell me that you do not know Lady Ethel? Why, Lord Moresby is worth a fabulous sum. She's the greatest catch in town."

"You forget I have only recently returned from abroad."

"Oh, ah, I forgot. Well, anyhow there's not a ghost of a chance for you, old boy. Better keep away. Take my advice and don't singe your wings. You'll only leave your heart behind you. My lady is impervious to pretty speeches."

"Don't be an idiot, De Vere," growled Charlie, for he was in no mood for chaff. "Introduce me."

"Oh certainly, but forewarned is forearmed."

He heard no words of introduction, but the next moment he found himself alone with the woman of his dreams, for the man she had been talking with walked away biting his lips with annoyance at the interruption of his *tête-à-tête*.

"So glad to meet you again, Lady Ethel," blurted out Charlie after a—to him—painful silence of some few seconds. Nothing like riding straight was his inward soliloquy as he spoke, and no sooner had the words left his lips than he turned and their eyes met.

"Again——" she faltered.

"Yes. This room is suffocating and there are no end of people looking at us. Lady Ethel, will you take my arm?"

For answer the little gloved hand was slipped within his keeping and they passed into the cool moist air of the conservatory, where the arching fronds of the tree ferns waved above their heads. They were alone for supper had defeated flirtation. She was the first to speak:

"I—I did not catch your name. You are——"

"Piers Mostyn," and for the rest he slipped the locket with its gilded coronet into her hand.

"Thank God we have met at last," she said impetuously, and the rich blood mounted to her cheeks. "I wanted so much to thank you and they told me you were going abroad and—but I wrote to your mother."

A cloud crossed his face and the thought flashed through his mind, *why* had he never even heard of that letter?

"I never knew it," he answered briefly.

"Still, *now* we have met. But for you I should be—ah, I shudder to think of it. I owe you my life; how can I ever repay you?"

"Do what you have done already: thank God," he answered gravely and then he plunged on recklessly. What possessed him? But he was a Piers Mostyn to the backbone, and his race had ever rushed their fences.

"Lady Ethel, you will deem me mad, but if you think you owe me anything, listen. To-day as you were driving I saw you for the first time since *that night*. I have cherished the memory of those few brief moments, when I held you in my arms, *from then till now*. I have no right to speak to you thus, but to-night I have staked my all upon the bare chance of meeting you. I ought to have left hours ago for Paris. I am here. Rank and promotion, perhaps *honour*, I have flung to the winds for your sake. I—I—Ethel, I love you. Ah, I have offended you, madman that I am. Tell me, for God's sake, are you angry?"

The birds disturbed by the unwonted noise twittered to each other in their gilded aviary, and the soft murmur of the water as it babbled and fell in cascades in its marble prison were the only sounds that broke the silence, as he stood before her, trembling at his own audacity; and waited for her answer.

"Are you angry?" he repeated. "Tell me quickly, I cannot leave you thus. Can you love me; may I even hope?"

The gold-brown head was never raised, but the lips tremulously framed the words and her answer came to him:

"I owe you everything."

One hasty kiss, a pressure of the soft warm hand and his was the fulness of content. It was a *quick thing*, but it brought a life-long happiness in its train.

GOLDEN SANDS.

By J. SALE LLOYD,

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWS OF THE PAST," "THE HAZELHURST MYSTERY,"
"WE COSTELIONS," ETC., ETC.

"VIOLET, where did you get that ring?" A start, a vivid flush, a look of decided vexation and a sharp reply—that is how our first quarrel began; before that, great Scott! how happy we had been.

"Jack, how absurd you are, and why do you startle me like that? As to the ring, it is mine; is not that enough for you?"

"No, it is not enough; and I choose to be answered."

"A lord of creation!" laughed my wife somewhat bitterly. "You think then you have only to command, and I shall obey."

A pair of too bright eyes were turned upon me; they glittered with a light I had never seen in them before.

"Of course you will obey, Violet."

"Of course I shall *not*, Jack."

We stood looking at each other—we two who loved so well—with anger welling in both our hearts.

"That is a gentleman's ring," I continued.

"I did not say it was not."

"Whose is it? Where did it come from?"

"I will not tell you if you question me for a month," cried my wife impatiently; "so let us drop the subject."

Can any one explain what jealousy is? How that wild pang, that frenzied brain-fire first finds life? All I know is that it then took possession of *me*. I, who loved her so well, distrusted my wife, and she knew it.

"No, we cannot drop the subject as you suggest," I returned doggedly.

"Why?"

"Because—because if you had nothing to conceal you would speak openly, and tell me what I wish to know."

"What do you mean by conceal? You *cannot* think——"

She broke off suddenly. There was a startled quiver of the delicate nostril, a tremble of the red lip. She came very close to me, and laid her hand upon my arm.

"If I thought you *could* doubt me, Jack," she said, "I should know how to act; but you might be sure by now that I have too much spirit to be *ordered* by any man. I cannot tell you anything about the ring at present."

Our happiness hung then in the balance. I overturned it. I worshipped this woman. I longed to strain her to my heart and press my lips to hers; but some demon held me back.

"As I turned the corner just now I thought I saw Arthur Vane come out of our gate. Was I right?"

"Probably. My cousin only left a few minutes since."

"I see. He is a diamond merchant."

I went very close to her, and laid my hand roughly upon her white wrist—yes, roughly! I could see the print of my fingers upon the tender flesh. I saw it then of course, but I thought little of it at the time; but since—well, it does not bear thinking of.

"*Did your cousin bring you that ring?*" and my eyes were fixed upon hers as though they would read her very soul.

Before she and I were married people had said that Arthur Vane loved her with a more than cousinly love. Now it all came back to me as though the sun were let in upon my sometime darkened mind.

The stately little head was thrown back, the bright dark eyes met mine fearlessly; but a flood of crimson glow rushed over the sweet proud face, and receding, left her pale.

"What if he did?" she asked coldly—so coldly that I knew she was keeping down some strong excitement.

"If he did *we must part*. I will not allow you to receive presents from a former lover."

"Who told you that Arthur was my lover?"

"It was well known. And now, Violet, will you answer me?"

She stood regarding me with an *awed* expression in the startled eyes. For a time she neither moved nor spoke. Then she replied as though the words were wrung from her with difficulty.

"In the weary days which may come and go, remember that you sent me from you, and that you doubted my honour. Good-bye."

She turned like a sleep-walker, and went over the smooth lawn towards the house. I watched her with a sense of despair about my heart. If only my darling would confess her folly; if only she would tell me the truth, and ask me to forgive her, I felt that my jealousy would be crumpled up, and that she would be my own again. Even if Arthur Vane *had* cared for her, and had given her his ring, she must have loved my own worthless self best, or she never would have married me. I looked around my pretty garden, which Violet and I had laid out together only twelve months before, the smooth tennis-lawn, the many formed beds bejewelled with blossoms, the clusters of evergreens, the rose-hung gabled cottage—all looked so home-like, and had brought us two so much happiness. I shook myself together, and went in-doors to try and make it up with my wife; *but she was gone*, no one knew whither.

Those were weary hours of waiting. Every moment I hoped

she would return ; but the shades of evening closed in, and morning dawned upon my desolation.

Violet had no relations except Arthur Vane, so where *could* she have gone ?

As quick as thought I dressed, and leaving my house, I went to that of my wife's cousin. He was not up, but I forced my way into his room notwithstanding the expostulations of his servants.

He sat up in bed and regarded me with genuine astonishment, then his eyes wandered to the clock upon his mantelpiece.

"My dear Bradley," he exclaimed in surprise, "you are an early visitor. I haven't finished my beauty sleep yet."

"Where is Violet ?" I asked abruptly, staring at him.

It was his turn to stare after that. "My good fellow, you must have a *tile loose* to come to me with such a question," and he touched his own head as he spoke.

I sat down in a chair and buried my face in my hands ; after a while I looked up, and found him regarding me in utter astonishment.

"Why did Violet not marry you, Vane ?" I inquired desperately.

He broke into a heart-whole laugh. "Were I a conceited man I might reply because I never asked her."

"You never asked her, yet every one said you loved her."

"So I did—dear little cousin Vi—she is the best woman who ever lived—save one."

"And that one ?"

"I hope to introduce to you as my wife some day, but I should never have gained Flora, but for Vi."

"She never told me."

"No, she wouldn't, nor should I if the shadows were not nearly past. I am to be married next month, this after years of waiting is good news ; no wonder I slept well ! Violet will be glad. She has helped me, and kept my secret for the past five years."

I absolutely groaned.

"That ring," I gasped, "the ring you took to my wife yesterday ?"

"What ! has she told you about it after all ?" he inquired in surprise ; "well, one thing is evident, she can keep my secrets better than her own. You have won a prize in winning my cousin Violet. She is as true as steel, and if only Flora loves me one half as well as *she* loves *you* I shall be the happiest man alive."

"I certainly am the most miserable," I broke out.

"You ! why, I thought——"

"Ah ! so did I—but—Vane, *my wife has left me !*"

For full sixty seconds he gazed at me in astonishment ; then he got up and dressed himself, and went towards the door.

"Where are you going ?" I asked.

"To the doctor's; you're all wrong, my dear boy."

If it had not been unmanly I should have cried outright.

"The ring," I repeated, "for the love of Heaven tell me about it. Why did you give it to my wife? and why did she hide the fact from me?"

Arthur Vane returned and looked at me curiously, as though I were some strange specimen of the species.

"By Jove! like that, are you? Bradley, I think jealous people should be treated like mad dogs, no one can tell what harm they will do. I never fancied before that you would have doubted Violet's truth and my honour."

His hard words hit straight home.

I sat staring at the pattern of the carpet, but presently I plucked up spirit to make another protest.

"The ring!" I repeated doggedly, "there must have been some secret about that."

"You are right, there was. I promised to keep it; but now I believe it would be better kept in the breach than the observance. The secret is, that your loving wife heard you express the wish that you could afford a handsome diamond ring, and ever since has been saving from her pin-money to gratify your whim. I let her have the diamond at cost price, and got it properly set for her, poor girl, and yesterday I ran in with it as I passed. It was for your coming birthday. She was delighted with it, and at the thought of your pleasant surprise; and it is deuced hard that her love and kindness should get her into trouble. As for myself I will help in no more domestic secrets. Poor Violet! I wish to goodness I knew what had become of her. She was so absurdly fond of you, that she would take the affair to heart."

My shame, joy and sorrow were oddly mingled.

"Why, why she did not tell me?" I exclaimed eagerly. "I came home unexpectedly, and crossed the grass to meet her. She never saw me, she was so much engrossed gazing at a diamond ring. She then tried to hide it, and appeared very much vexed and confused. I insisted on hearing who had given it to her."

"And naturally she wouldn't tell you; girls won't be bullied."

"Oh! *why* did she not let me into her secret?" I groaned.

"Rather, *why* did you insult a true woman by your doubts? In your place I should not lose a moment. I should seek her *at once* and let her know *what I thought of myself*. She loves you and will therefore forgive."

I got up and grasped his hand.

He had taken a weight off my mind. Yet what a heavy one there was left. *Where* was I to find my darling; and when found would she pardon me, not only my doubt of her, but my rough usage?

Yes! I remembered now vividly how I had caught her by the wrist and left my mark upon the white flesh.

I did seek my wife—Heaven knows I sought her—but with no success.

I spent my whole leave going from place to place, first upon one false track, then another.

I was a civil servant, and not by any means a rich man, although my income was a comfortable one.

When I returned to my work the fellows exclaimed at the sight of me.

Grey hairs had crept into my erst dark locks; all my jollity had left me. I was melancholy and, well, I must own it—disagreeable.

There were reports innumerable as to why Violet had gone away; and I was silent on the subject—silent as the grave. Doubtless I was not a pleasant companion, and my best friends grew tired of me. I did not mind that. I haunted the private inquiry offices, and lived upon the excitement of false scents.

I couldn't rest in my home, every spot in it reminded me of my lost darling. Twelve months passed.

I applied for my leave again.

I had almost given up hope of finding Violet.

That year had gone heavily for me, but it had been brisk enough to others. Arthur Vane was a happy benedict, and his wife was one of the prettiest women I had ever seen.

Their happiness made me envious; my lack of it, and my conduct to Violet, caused them to give me the proverbial cold shoulder. So I did not see much of them; when I did, I used sometimes to wonder at an expression I more than once caught in Mrs. Vane's remarkably beautiful eyes. Afterwards I understood its meaning.

As I said before, the time had come for me to go on leave once more.

I took no pleasure whatever in the prospect. My health required the change, so I must go, but otherwise work was better for me, inasmuch as it gave me less time for thought.

I decided upon a well-known seaport in North Wales, and made up my mind to travel by a late evening train.

Something detained me, and I as nearly as possible lost it.

It had begun to glide out of the station, but the guard was a good-natured man, and hustled me into the very last carriage. It proved a most comfortable one and was empty.

I had it to myself the whole way, and slept through the live-long night.

Once I heard the door open, and a strange voice say "Golden Sands," but I wove it into my dream, and my sleep was disturbed no more until an abrupt jolt shook me so decidedly that I really awoke. There was a light in my carriage certainly, such as it was, but it was nearly out. I put my head from the window and saw another dim light, and for the second time I heard the words "Golden Sands" repeated in a very sleepy voice.

I called to its owner, and after a few minutes conversation, I learnt that I had got into a slip carriage, and had been left behind by the express train some miles away, from whence a good strong horse had tugged it along at a slow pace, and there was no mode of return for the next twelve hours! So there was nothing to do but to make the best of a bad bargain.

There fortunately was a little inn at which to finish the night, and breakfast, and I took advantage of it.

When I finally awoke the following morning the sun was somewhat high in the sky, and as I looked from my window I felt almost repaid for my mistake.

Mistake did I call it! It was the direct hand of fate, and no mistake at all.

The inn was situated some half-mile inland, upon high ground, and the sea view was a glorious one, with a broad reach of the ocean as far as eye could range. Before me lay a small fisher settlement, and the fishers were then sailing off into the distance, with their tawny red sails set to the breeze; not one was left behind.

A desire came upon me to follow them. I never had been out fishing, but I thought I should like it, the boats appeared to ride the waters so smoothly and with so much ease.

I dressed, had my breakfast, and strolled down to the beach. Upon my way I was interested in a small but picturesque cottage, the garden of which led to the shore and a rustic boathouse. From the distance a sweet voice floated, singing one of my darling's songs, and the voice rooted me to the spot.

A woman passed. I asked her who lived there, and she told me. I gleaned from her busy tongue that it was the seaside retreat of an elderly literary lady named Miss Nation, and my dream was broken. My only wonder was that Miss Nation had retained such a perfect voice at mature years.

I walked on to the cottages on the beach. One boat was lying high and dry. Its owner was one of those men plying upon the world of waters, but the owner's wife was there. The woman hesitated. She acknowledged that she did not know much about the boat, but she was sure it wanted something done to it, and "her man" was going to see to it when he had leisure, as they did sometimes have a few visitors who liked a pull, and it was the only one suitable for hire at Golden Sands, and they were glad to earn a few shillings by it, for their family was large and their means were small.

I did not find it very difficult to persuade her to let me take the little craft, and she willingly provided me with bait and tackle, and assisted me to push off, herself.

As the boat glided along under my not too skilful guidance, I looked back at Miss Nation's cottage, and became aware that some one was at the window watching me, but there were lace curtains

inside and flowers out, so I could see but little of the lady, who nevertheless appeared to me to be quite young, and moreover my wild fancy imagined the colour of the hair and the contour of the face to be like those of my wife.

I went bump up against a projecting piece of rock. *Such a bump!* but I took little or no notice of the circumstance, and on I pulled; but, impatient for sport, I did not go very far, but let down my anchor and put out my line.

Watching the water made me sleepy, and I was soon at the bottom of the boat and in the "land of nod."

I awoke with a species of nightmare. I thought I was being drowned, and started to find it almost true. The boat was full of water, and might go down at any moment. I sprang up and seized the oars. Life during the past year had never seemed much worth the having, but now that it had come to a question of parting with it I was far from willing to do so. I was a veritable cockney, and had never learnt to swim, and up to the time I had married Violet I preferred lampposts to trees, Regent Street to the prettiest view in the world, and my club to any other place. I pulled my hardest for dear life. Yes, I acknowledged, with all my sadness and sorrow, life was *still* dear! And I got back shorewards as far as the very rock on which I had bumped, and no doubt added to the injuries the boat had already sustained. There she dived like a bird of the ocean, and I was left in the water in company with the oars and fishing tackle. I clung to one of the oars which washed up against the rock.

That rock was very attractive. I thought so at that moment, and scrambled on to its rough point, regardless of the discomfort of my position, and I managed to fish the oar up towards me with my foot, and digging it into the sand and seaweed below, it helped to steady me in my perilous position.

The busy wives of the fishermen worked on in their cottages without a thought of me, and I could see no one, absolutely no one, from whom to hope for assistance. "I began to wonder how long it would be possible to remain where I was. Nature, which objects to aches, pains and discomfort, said "only for a very little while." I looked towards the window where I had seen Miss Nation, but that hope left me; no one was there.

But wait! My heart leapt into my mouth. I saw a flutter of petticoats in the garden. If only I could make the literary lady hear or see! I struggled to get out my handkerchief from my coat tail pocket, and as nearly as possible lost my balance. Furiously I waved and as furiously I shouted.

Yes, I was heard or seen! A white handkerchief was waved in return.

That was perhaps the very happiest moment of my life. I make the confession with shame, but I must tell the truth. The horror of a watery grave was almost too much for me. Violet was well-

nigh forgotten. The most charming creature in all the world to me seemed middle-aged Miss Nation. I determined, no matter what I suffered, to hold on until that good woman sent me succour.

Sent! She was an angel; she was coming herself! The door of the boathouse was thrown open; the boat was quickly drawn through a little creek; in another moment Miss Nation was in it, and pulling towards me with able hands.

I was still in misery, but I was exultant. Had I been a single man I should then have made a vow to marry Miss Nation, regardless of her age and blue stockings. As it was there could be no harm in my admiring the back of her neck. The old lady had thick brown hair coiled about a shapely head, and even in my critical position I questioned how she had managed to retain it so long, when I had a thin place coming on the crown of mine at nine-and-twenty, and wondered whether she would be offended if I were to ask for the recipe for her hair wash! Miss Nation's skin too was creamy white. The sun shone upon her neck and showed up its dazzling fairness. Once or twice a face gave a rapid glance around. I thought I must be getting delirious! Miss Nation was *so very like my wife*, and how she was pulling, as though *her* life as well as mine depended upon her speed!

My pulses were throbbing wildly; a strong hope broke out in my heart like sunshine. My eyes never left the fair form. The boat shot alongside that jagged rock, which was but a sorry sort of resting-place, and those dear eyes which I knew so well were shining with tears and looking at me full of love.

"Oh, Jack! thank God I am in time," she said, and that was all. Not an unkind word, not a reproach. My heart was too full then for speech, but I clasped my arms about her and made a solemn vow—and what is more, I have kept it.

No young married woman in society has had more admirers than my wife, but the first cloud in our lives was our last, and I never had cause to regret my accidental visit to Golden Sands.

I understood after a long talk with Violet what Mrs. Arthur Vane's eyes had so often said to me. *She* knew where my wife was hiding, Miss Nation being in fact her own aunt, and there is but little doubt that she many times longed to let me into the secret.

TWO PARAGRAPHS IN THE PARIS PAPERS.

By E. GE. SOMERVILLE.

Thursday, April 8, 188—.

I, Pierce Cormac, have no great story to tell, and I do not know what impulse it is that is driving me this dull rainy morning to set down the events of the last few weeks. But to a man to whom such a thing has happened as has happened to me, the future may have interest enough to warrant the telling of all that is anyway concerned with what may be before me. God knows I shall be glad enough if some day, in two or three years maybe, I can put this paper in the fire and say to myself, "It was nothing after all—a false alarm."

I am now writing in a small room high up in an hotel in the Rue des Saints Pères, Paris; but until a few weeks ago I lived a very quiet life in the heart of the County Clare. I was my father's second son, and at the time of my elder and only brother's death, I was being educated in Paris with a view to becoming a priest. I was fifteen years old when I first went to Paris, knowing nothing but what the national schoolmaster had toilsomely taught me, and, except in the matter of the French language, I had not added much to my small stock of learning when, two years later, poor Redmond died, and my father, who was a widower, sent for me to come home.

He took away my hand from the plough, saying the priesthood was a good trade for second sons, but was not fit business for his heir. He sent me to college, and I spent four years in Dublin, where I learnt to speak in a brogue—having almost forgotten my native inflection during my schooling in France—and acquired a smattering of the law, and generally fitted myself to take my seat on the bench of magistrates when I finally came home for good.

Soon afterwards my father died; and, there being no apparent reason why I should do otherwise, I went on living at Carrig Frass, with little to interest me beyond my horses and my shooting, and nothing to do but look after my small property, which at best brought me in about five or six hundred a year.

One day—it was my birthday, the 13th of last month, March—I rode over to Bludth. Bludth is a hamlet, about fourteen Irish miles off, and it is as forsaken a place as you could ever see. The only decent building in it is the police barracks—a tall, white-washed box of a place, with triangular iron blinds to the windows, like the vizors which you see on old helmets. There are a couple

of public-houses, and the rest of "the street," as they call it, is composed of wretched little thatched cottages, of which, for the most part, I have the honour of being the proprietor.

My business was to collect rent, and bad as the times are, I got the greater part of the few pounds which I was owed. At one house only, the last in the row, which had straggled a little apart from the others, was my rent refused to me.

The man who owned it was an ill-conditioned blackguard, who was more than suspected of being an agent in the many moon-lighting outrages that have disgraced this county. I had stopped at his house in coming, and left word with his wife that this was his last chance, and that I would "have the law of him" if he did not pay up. Now as I rode away, I stayed for a moment outside and called again for Daniel Herlihy. No answer came; the door was shut, and as I rode on I whistled to Shaun, my little yellow Irish terrier, to follow me without further delaying.

He had fallen some distance behind, nosing about at the side of the road, and as he passed Herlihy's cabin a large dog jumped over the wall of the potato-garden, and knocking him over, began to worry him. I jumped off and left the mare standing in the middle of the road while I did my best to separate the dogs. At last, by dint of laying into the aggressor—a big grey brindled cur that had often before attacked me—with my crop, I made him loose his hold of Shaun's throat, and with a kick that must have tested the stuff his ribs were made of, I sent him over the wall.

Shaun was but little the worse for the encounter; my own hand had got a good deal torn by either his or the grey dog's teeth, but it was nothing to signify, and I soon tied it up with my pocket-handkerchief. The mare was rooting with her nose in the mud on the top of the fence and let me catch her without trouble, and I started again.

It was past six o'clock, an angry-looking, stormy afternoon. I was riding up a valley through the hills to the west, in the teeth of the wind which was blowing big brown clouds over the high edge of the mountains through the gap in which the sun had gone down. A desolate little lake, half-smothered by rushes, fills up the lower end of the valley through which my road went. It was black with the small waves that the wind had whipped all over it, and the nearer hills hid it from the yellow light that was still flowing in a long stream over the shoulder of Forná. The narrow bohíreen on which I was travelling was squeezed close in between the lake—Lough Clure, its name is—and the steep, up-springing sides of a furzy hill that rose nearly sheer out of the water. I remember the thought striking me that this was just the sort of time one might expect to meet the Black Hound that the country-people say lives in Lough Clure. They say he comes up now and then, dark and dripping out of the water, and on whoever he lays his paw there comes a black sickness like the plague, and no one

has ever recovered from it. But one cannot believe all their stories.

A little boy riding on a donkey met me; a grey ghost of a donkey, and a little boy who looked in the twilight as ghostly as his jackass. He bobbed his head to me as he passed, but I did not take any notice of him. I was jogging steadily on, with the rent, which had been paid me in very small coin, clinking in my pockets. My thoughts were back in Paris. This was a good-for-nothing, colourless life I was living—no profession, no hopes, no future. I wished there had never been any idea of making a priest of me. It was an unlucky thing, somehow, to have gone back of a resolve of that kind. I could not shake off a superstitious feeling that doing so had brought some blight over my life.

"My Gad! Look at the little dog!"

This from the donkey-boy whom I had just passed, blended with a yell from a dog. I looked round; the boy was off his donkey stooping over something in the road. I rode quickly back to where he was standing, and there saw Shaun struggling in the dust, half of his head laid open by a blow from a large stone that lay on the road by him.

"'Twas Dan Herlihy thrun it," the donkey-boy said excitedly. "I seen him run north over the hill through the furze."

I got off my horse again, but this time I could do little for poor Shaun. One of his eyes was knocked clean away—I would rather he had been killed by the dog. I lifted him up and took him home in my arms, and the next morning, with a sorry heart, I put a bullet through his head. Poor little Shaun! I wonder if it will ever come to that with me.

I had no proofs against Herlihy: all I could do was to determine to get the last penny of his rent out of him, and, if ever the chance came in my way, to show him as little mercy as he had shown Shaun.

The chance has not come yet; but if I pull through this thing that is on me now, please God I will pay Shaun's debt and a little trifle I owe Dan Herlihy on my own account, honestly and with interest.

However, at the time there was nothing for me to do but sit still, and it was just three weeks later that I was told one morning that a woman was at the door wanting to speak to me. It was Herlihy's wife, a gaunt careworn-looking creature, who kept her head covered up in the hood of her cloak, and spoke in a hoarse frightened voice.

"Sir, your honour," she began, "niver say the word to Dan that I come here. Sure I'd have come before, but I wouldn't be let by him." She paused and then went on hurriedly:

"There was a person said you were bit by our dog that time you rode into Bludth yisterday three weeks. Your honour, sir," she said, coming a step nearer, "whatever way the dog was that

day, the day after he was runnin' mad thro' the counthry, and the polis couldn't kill him till he had three of Mahony's cows bitten, and himself half dead with the boys hunting him."

"How do you know he was mad?"

"Ere yisterday was the twenty-first day with the cows, and wan of thim's dead already."

"Who was the person said I was bitten?"

She began to cry:

"Oh, that I'd have it to say of my own husband! Dan seen it, your honour! he was inside in the house and he seen you tying up your hand, and he never let on a word till after the cow's dying, an' thin he says, 'There'll be more that way!' says he. 'Why so?' says I, and he says——"

I cut her story short. My temper is none of the best, and the less I heard about Dan Herlihy the better.

"I am obliged to you for your trouble," I said; for after all she had come a long way to tell me of what she believed to be my danger. "Here is something for you, and go round to the cook and get some dinner. And then you may go home and tell your blackguard of a husband that I am quite well and mean to keep so, and that he'll hear more of me before he's done with me."

With that I put a couple of shillings in her hand and turned my back upon her. She took the money as if she only half liked doing so and went slowly on round the house to the yard, while I stood on my hall door steps and began to think over what she had just told me.

My house is built high up on a hill-side and there is a fine view from the front of it. You look straight out over rough tumbling hills to the sea, and the Shannon lies to the south, cutting the country in two like the bright blade of a knife. There was hardly a touch of white in the blue sky that April morning. Very high up there was a lark singing; in the lower levels of the air plover were wheeling and whistling; the wind brought the soft spring-music of the bleating of lambs to me in purring waves of sound. It shook the fuchsia hedge that was sprouting at the foot of the garden and brought the crisp sheaths of the elm-tree buds fluttering down on to the ground.

I suppose I noticed these things then, or I should not be able to feel them so clearly now—but I do not remember doing so. I stared at the purple mark on my right hand where the wound made by the dog's teeth had been. It was too late now for any of the ordinary rough and ready cures; and the probability seemed to be that as I had kept well up to this, nothing was going to happen to me and I need take no precautionary measures. Indeed only for the cows I don't believe I would have thought twice about it, but their dying certainly gave me a bit of a shake; and the talk I had with the dispensary doctor not long ago, about this Monsieur Pasteur's cure for hydrophobia, recurred to me—(though

to tell the truth, little Considine said he had no such great opinion of it)—and I had been feeling unsettled and restless for some time; in fact, putting one thing and another together, I thought the best thing I could do was to start off for Paris as soon as I could.

I do not mean to pretend that I had or have much faith in this system of Pasteur's. I had heard only very little of it from Doctor Considine, and had read about as much in the newspapers; and I think I am not disposed to believe new things very readily. I am a bit of a fatalist and don't hold much with doctors. If you live for seven or eight years in one of the remotest parts of Ireland, your intellectual part gets very sodden; and being bred up for a priest is bad training for the mind. I had to swallow so many queer stories of the old-fashioned miracles when I was a boy that I have no capacity for new ones: it is as much as I can do to hold on to the beliefs that were taught me at school; and after all, with all the trouble they gave me to believe them, they do not seem to make much difference in my life or any one else's.

The doctors and the priests do their best—first the one and then the other; but hereabouts I think the "mountain men," who see little of either, get on just as well as the rest. However, all this is neither here nor there—as they say—and to come back to where I started from, whether I believed in Pasteur or no, it was well worth taking the off-chance of following his treatment, when it involved getting away from Carrig Frass. Even if I were going to die in a week, I would be glad to live that last week in Paris.

There was a little hotel towards the lower end of the Rue des Saints Pères that I knew very well. My only friend in Paris, outside the walls of the seminary, had lived there. He was an American art-student, a distant connection of mine through some long-since emigrated relative, and my rare holidays had always been spent with him.

It did not look the same place to me yesterday afternoon, when I arrived cold and tired after my long journey. There is a new proprietor and the house is all changed: the big pots with prickly shrubs in them no longer block up the doorway and I missed old Hector, the big dog who used to sprawl across the narrow hall. I looked idly down the list with the names of the inmates, which hung, each name against its respective key, in the bureau, with an illogical hope that after eight years "Wilbur G. Collins" might still be found opposite key No. 56, *au cinquième*; but a name so outlandish that I remember it still—"Zdenka Vorschak"—was what I saw. I don't even know if it is a man's or a woman's.

It was a dark gloomy evening. The rain and wind that had beaten against the windows of Carrig Frass all that long night—the night before my start—the night after Bridget Herlihy had told me the dog was mad—had faithfully followed me. The rain and that fierce west wind had travelled express across England

and France as well as I, and were seemingly as undefeated here in Paris as they had been at home.

I was very tired, and I went to bed early, but I could not sleep for a long time. Most of the old hotels on the farther side of the Seine have as many rooms as a beehive has cells, and the thinness of the partition walls in the Hôtel Saint Roch spared me none of the pounding of pianos, the trampings to and fro, and the noisy good-nights which went on till past twelve. Piercing through these rougher sounds I had heard the voice of a violin; and as they one by one fell into silence, the violin notes grew louder and stronger. It was a wild, miserable sort of music, the like of which I had never heard before. It kept me awake for a long time, and when I got to sleep at last I believe it mixed some way with my dreams.

I thought that I was back in Carrig Frass, and that there were dogs howling round the house. Then the howling died into a long cry, like as if some one was being killed. But whatever was happening I could not move to give any help. I was dead, paralyzed, all but my bitten right hand, which kept clutching at my throat as if it were possessed, and wanted to tear it out of me.

My father used to tell me I was no better than an old woman for believing in dreams; and though there never was any one less superstitious than I am, I don't like a bad dream any more than another man.

Anyhow, when I awoke, two or three hours ago, I felt anything but refreshed. It is a dim, wet morning, and while the faint noises of the street have with the strengthening light slowly crept into my room, I have occupied myself by writing this rough account of how I have come here, and I will continue to do the same so long as anything happens that seems to me worth the trouble of writing out.

April 10th.

Well, I have been to M. Pasteur, and he and the rest have shaken their heads over me, and said I have come too late and that it is a bad case.

I would like to know what reason they have for saying that. I cannot even be sure if it was Shaun or the mad dog that bit me; and, anyhow, I came as soon as I could. They tell me I must go to them twice, mornings and evenings, but I will not. If they cannot get enough poison into me once in a day they will have to be content to let me be a decimal on the wrong side of their average of cures. Dr. Considine told me it was only once a day they injected the stuff—"and quite often enough too," he said, and he is a smart little man and knows what he is talking about. I am not going to have anything to say to their "intensive treatment," and so I told them—I more than half think I was a fool for coming at all. Paris is not what I remember it, and I am very lonely here with no one to speak to.

Yesterday morning was my first visit to M. Pasteur's, and I went there again to-day. It is a curious place, and they are a funny crew of people that you see there, from every nation on the earth, all waiting to have what you would think was worse than death put into their veins for the sake of getting life out of it. I could not help wondering for how many of them the bargain would turn out successfully.

There was a strange-looking girl got into the same tram as I did, when I was leaving the Panthéon yesterday. She had more soft greyish-yellow hair than she knew what to do with. It was wound in big wisps over her head like ropes of hay—"soogawns" we call them at home—and her eyes looked like wells of some pale yellow-green oil. I could not get her face out of my mind last night, while that fellow kept me awake with his fiddling. I wished he was dead, with his dirges.

This morning I met that girl again. This time I was in the Rue d'Ulm, just leaving the École Normale after my daily dose of poison. She looked very hard at me. I wonder if she recognized my white face and foxy hair again.

April 12th.

I never used to be much of a one to keep a diary, but now it seems I have taken a new turn. Perhaps it is what the old women call the change before death (though I don't believe I'm going to die at all). The night before last—just after I had made the last entry—the fiddling began again, worse than ever, screaming and crying like some creature in mortal pain. I was cross and tired, and I could not stand it. I rang for the *garçon* in vain, and finally I left my room, and making my way up the steep stairs to the next *étage*, I knocked at the door of the musician.

An inner door opened and shut, and then the door I was at was opened a very little.

"I ask pardon, monsieur," I began, "but I am an invalid, and your violin prevents me from sleeping."

The door was opened more widely, and I heard an exclamation in a woman's voice. The gas in the passage had been put out, and the lamp in the room behind her did not give much light, but with even less I should still have recognized the girl with the yellow hair.

"I regret that I have disturbed you, monsieur," she said in French, with a certain soft foreign accent that puzzled me as to her nationality. "I also am an invalid," she laughed a little, "but with me it is different—my violin helps me to sleep."

She turned and spoke to some one in the inner room, in a language which I had never heard before. An oldish woman came forward with the lamp in her hand.

"Rado, hold the light that monsieur may descend these charming stairs in safety," said the girl in French; "bonsoir, monsieur." She went into the inner room, slamming the door behind her, and

the servant stood with the lamp outside at the head of the stairs, until I had turned down the corridor to my own room.

What she had meant by saying that infernal fiddling sent her to sleep, I could not imagine. I like music well enough at a proper time, and as far as I could judge, she played remarkably well; but at one o'clock in the morning to be kept awake by screams and lamentations like an old woman keening at a funeral was more than I could stand.

And why had she laughed? Altogether she was a curious girl, and I wondered if I should meet her again out of doors next morning.

I looked out for her in the Rue d'Ulm and at the omnibus bureau outside the Panthéon, where I had seen her before. I thought it likely that she was taking lessons in music or the like, from some of the many teachers who live thereabouts. But I did not see her. I strolled on down the Rue du Panthéon, feeling very low in my mind. The doctors had been abusing me for not coming to them more than once a day; but, as I told them before, if they cannot cure me with one dosing per diem they will have to do without. Whatever, I believe I am as well as ever I was; it was only the sudden change from cold to hot spring weather that made me feel depressed and sick.

I looked in at the shop windows as I passed, and dull they were too. They are mostly all bookshops in the Rue du Panthéon, and although to speak French is as easy to me as to speak English, I do not care much about French literature; certainly not technical medical works such as filled one window at which I had stopped. A young girl was standing at it, apparently trying to read a pamphlet that was lying open inside. She turned round with a start, as I stood still behind her, and I saw it was the fair-haired violinist.

"Good morning, mademoiselle," I said, taking off my hat (being resolved not to let slip this opportunity of speaking to her); "I trust the cessation of the music last night did not keep you awake? It had the contrary effect upon me."

She lifted the pale yellow lashes that half concealed her eyes. "No, monsieur—the charm had worked; I slept well."

I wondered in my own mind what she meant by this, but I did not like to ask her. She had turned to study the pamphlet again; I saw it was one by a celebrated French doctor on "*La Rage*," and I felt, naturally, a sort of personal curiosity as to why she was reading it.

"Mademoiselle is interested in that subject?" I began again.

She turned upon me with a kind of defiance: "And why should I not be?" she laughed a little excitedly, but there was a hunted, frightened look in her face. "Is not every one talking of *la rage* now? You—you yourself seem to be interested in this illness; or else why do you go daily to M. Pasteur's?"

She said this still with a gay manner, but she watched closely for my answer.

"I am one of his patients, mademoiselle," I answered.

All the laughter left her face. She got very white.

"And so am I also," she said slowly, as if the words were forced out of her, her big eyes wide open, and looking as if a light had suddenly gone out behind them as she stared into my face.

April 17th.

The more I see of her, the more she perplexes me, and the more I think of her. Indeed, I keep thinking of very little else, these times, and I try to clear my head by writing as much down as I can.

There is a little *salon* in this hotel where no one ever sits, though it is supposed to be for the use of *pensionnaires*. I told her I was very lonely by myself all the long evenings, and I asked her would she come there after dinner and talk to me. I asked her that the second day after I spoke to her in the street, and she said she would come.

It is a dark little hole of a room, with nothing in it but a table and a hard little red velvet-covered sofa, and two or three chairs; and all the *garçon* would do for me to make it more cheerful was to light a couple of feeble flares of gas in the chandelier thing overhead.

(I think I might as well say here that the day I met her was the last on which I went to the doctor's. I was tired of it. I had lost faith somehow—if I ever had any—when they said I had come too late. I do not believe there is a thing that ails me. It was as likely Shaun's teeth that tore me as the other dog's. Anyhow, I will leave that fact to be found out by the practical test of time.)

I had been waiting in the little *salon*, and I was thinking of her all the time, but I did not hear her enter the room. She came lightly in, and the first I knew was another face reflected beside my own in the mirror over the chimney-piece where I was standing. It was a bad glass that gave everything a blue-green tone. It looked like a drowned woman that I saw in it.

She had on a long curious-looking white gown, with black and gold and red embroidering on it. She saw me look at it as I turned round and spoke to her.

"That is our Slavisch embroidery," she said, without taking any notice of what I said to her; "you seem to me, monsieur, a very incurious person. This is now the third or fourth time that we have spoken to each other, and yet you have asked me neither my name nor my nation; but I will tell them to you. My name is Zdenka Vorschak, and my country is Hungary. I am a Slav." She sat down as she spoke on the sofa by the wall; what light there was was full on her face. "And you?" she said.

I had known her name well enough, but I had waited for her to tell it to me herself. Now I answered the latter half of what she had said.

"I am Irish, mademoiselle, and my name is Pierce Cormac."

"You speak French very well. Have you been long in Paris?"

"I have been here before, but not for some years. I only came to this hotel a week ago."

"You have only been here, *chez Pasteur*, for a week? Then, when did it happen?"

I did not at first understand her.

"Happen?" I repeated stupidly, and I looked at her face for explanation.

Her eyes were fixed on my right hand, where the marks of the dog's teeth were still plain enough, for he had given me an ugly gash. Then it flashed on me what she was driving at, and I began to tell her how I had been bitten. As I spoke, my story became fuller and fuller. I told her of my life up to the day on which its current had been so unexpectedly changed. I told her everything that I have written here, and more, being held to speaking, and compelled to say all that was in my heart, yes, and more than I had thought was there, by the stress of her strange eyes. I felt almost giddy, as if I were looking into changing water, and it was not until I had finished speaking that I could take my gaze out of hers.

Then I saw how much paler she was than she had been when first she came into the room.

"I have tired you, mademoiselle," I said anxiously; "my story has been too long and tedious."

She did not mind what I said.

"There is something still that you have not told me," she said eagerly; "what was the day on which this happened?"

"I thought I had told you—the 13th of March, in the afternoon. I have always been quite sure of the date, as it chanced to be my birthday."

She looked at me as if she scarcely believed what I said.

"Mon Dieu, this story becomes very amusing," she said with a little laugh; "that day with the unlucky number is also my birthday. I wonder if there are any other points of resemblance. What was he like, *par exemple*, this dog who attacked yours? The dog who ——" She stopped without ending her sentence.

"He was a big grey brute," I answered, "brindled, with blueish-white eyes that had black centres to them no larger than an oat."

Her whole expression changed while I was speaking: there was nothing but fear in her face now.

"Holy Jesu," she said in a low voice, as if she had forgotten that I was there; "it was the same; that was what he was like—the creature who attacked me. I saw him running," she went on in the same frightened whisper, "running, a little speck on our broad white road; and then he was close to me. I could hear his gaspings; I could see his eyes like pale flames; it was the same, I tell you!" she cried wildly; "he was a devil; on the same day he destroyed us both; we shall both die ——"

She was standing up now, shaking from head to foot, and moving her hands in a way that somehow helped me to picture what she was describing. I took them both in mine, meaning to lead her back to the little sofa where she had been sitting. They closed on my hands with a nervous pressure that sent a thrill through me.

"Do you feel it?" she whispered; "it is burning as if there were teeth of fire in it. You cannot see it, your hand covers it. It was *my* right hand also that he tore; but you can feel it, you can feel it in your own."

Her voice broke off with a little sigh, and I felt her hold of my hands slacken.

I had never seen a woman faint before, having had but little to say to them one way or the other, and I did not know what I ought to do. But I am a big man, being a good bit over six feet high, and strong at that; and I just gathered her up in my arms and set out to carry her upstairs to her own room.

Though she is slight for her height, the carrying of her up those steep slippery stairs was no easy matter, and joined to the dread of stumbling was the fear that I might meet some one on the way. But by some lucky chance there was no one either on the stairs or about the passages. Her room was on the fourth *étage*, and I stopped outside her door to draw my breath.

Her head was on my right shoulder; her soft hair tickled my cheek. On my left shoulder lay her hand, her right hand. I could see plainly the dark scar where the dog had bitten her. I half knelt down in order to support her on my knee while I knocked at the door for her servant; but before I knocked I took her scarred hand in mine and kissed it.

April 24th.

Now that I have begun the trick of keeping this kind of diary it has got to be a necessity with me. I believe if I was dying I would still be trying to scrawl what was happening to me. Though why I talk of dying I don't know. It is the 42nd day with me now since I was bitten, and I see that there are only three cases recorded in which the time between the date when a man is bitten and when he goes mad is longer than that. I believe if there ever was any danger for either of us it is all over now. It certainly was a curious coincidence that she should have been bitten on the same day as I was, but I cannot say I think anything of that; and still less do I mind her foolish fancies about the dogs being alike. Herlihy's dog was just a common brindled cur, and it would be a much funnier thing if there were not a good many others like him in the world, than if there were an odd one of the same type.

However, as I am for ever saying to her, we are both quite sound and fit, and it might be the same dog or devil either, twenty times over, for all I care.

She and I meet each other now every day. We meet at 12 o'clock, at *déjeuner*, and after that we generally walk down to the river, and then along under the horse-chestnuts, that have all broken into full leaf during these last warm days, to the Pont d'Iéna, and so on into the gardens of the Trocadéro, where there is every sweet shrub flowering and the birds singing, and I think of Carrig Frass and thank God I'm not there.

She knows no one in Paris any more than I do. Her people, I think, are very poor. She was talking to me a few days ago about her loneliness here, and she said she had only just enough to keep her and her servant for the six weeks for which they had settled to come here, and to pay their way back to Southern Hungary again. Her six weeks will be up this day week. She has taken the treatment regularly, and I should think she is as safe as any one can be, but it is easy to see that she does not think so herself. She has often a flighty, excitable way with her that shows the state her nerves are in. She badly wants some one to look after her.

To-day she was telling me about her life in that big flat silent country she comes from. The long quiet plains, speckled as far as you can see with flocks of sheep and herds of cattle and horses; the little villages dotted here and there over the wide sea of grass, and the Danube, sweeping its burden of rafts and barges between fringes of poplar into the level blue distance, seem to fulfil all her ideas of what a landscape ought to be. I believe I could show her something better than that at home in the county Clare.

She says she is going to be a musician, and until she came here all her days were given to practising the violin with that object in view.

"Here, I have to give up my eight hours a day," she said with a look at me that had laughter behind it though her face was quite serious; "the *pensionnaires* might not like it. But I play as much as I can," she went on; "it is my violin that keeps me alive—only for it—" She broke off and leaned towards me across the little yellow tin table at which we were sitting; for we were in our usual quiet corner in the gardens of the Trocadéro. "Were you disturbed by my playing last night?"

"It was a hot night," I answered evasively, "I should not have slept in any case." Indeed, long after she had ceased, I had lain awake tossing and thinking, thinking—

"There are some nights," she went on quickly, with the scared white look coming into her face which I had seen in it before, "when I must play; then I cannot hear the sound of its feet galloping softly towards me, and its pantings. Last night I thought of you, and I would not play more. I put the violin away and I put out the light and got into my bed. I told myself I was an imbecile, I would not listen; but it came, I heard it coming across the floor—Rado was asleep; she was snoring so loudly you

would have thought I could hear nothing else, but I knew it was there."

"How did you know it?" I said, though I knew I was a fool to encourage her in speaking of such fancies.

Her right hand was lying on the table, ungloved; my eyes followed hers to the purple mark of the now healed wound.

"He licked it," she said, "he laid his hot tongue on it; there, on the place where he had bitten it——"

Her face was quivering and she kept giving quick short looks to every side, as if she expected to see the creature she had dreamed of, coming again to attack her.

It was more than I could stand, to sit there and watch her. I got up and walked round the table and sat down by her side.

"Dear mademoiselle," I said, taking her cold hand in mine, "these are all fancies. Your nerves are strung too high, and your imagination plays on them as you do on your violin. You soon will leave Paris, and will forget all about this trouble and everything connected with it. I suppose I ought to hope that for that reason you will also forget me, but I am not capable of so much unselfishness."

I tried to make my voice sound as little serious as I could, but it shook a bit in spite of me. Something in the touch of her hand unsteadied me, and the speaking of her going away had made the thought of her doing so more of a reality than it had ever been before.

"But I cannot forget," she answered, quickly withdrawing her hand from mine. "It hangs over me always—I am not afraid of death, but it is the shame of it—to die like an animal—or to be smothered; they did that to a man in a village near us who was mad. Promise me," she said, turning her shining frightened eyes upon me, "promise me if it comes upon me here that you will shoot me—I shall not mind that—there would be no degradation in dying like that—I would not ask you, but you are the only friend I have in Paris."

I tried to answer her, but I could find no words. A passion of love and pity was fighting with the knowledge that a man with death at his elbow, as I have, has no right to speak of such things. She watched my face anxiously.

"Will you not promise?" she said. "I know there might be danger for you too—but I thought—I hoped——"

My self-control broke down. I said no word to her, but I took her in my arms and kissed her many times. I was mad for the moment. I forgot everything but the sense that she was in my arms, held tight up against my heart, with the wind blowing her hair all about my hot forehead, and her sweet lips giving their sweetness to me.

I do not know what I said to her and the few words that she whispered to me—while the wind in the young leaves, and the clear

whistling of the birds, and love made an undersound of songs together in my heart—they are sacred, and will never be known until I die, and the blessed saints read them in my soul, where they are written in pure fire and will burn for ever. But after a time we awoke again to our usual lives; and though our eyes were still dazzled by the light of that high place where our souls had been, we began to see the shadow that we had both for a time escaped from.

It was evening when we walked home, and the last low rays of the sun were breaking in sparkles on the swift Seine.

"Dear," she said, "I know now that it is true what a gipsy woman at home once told me and I am glad of it. She said my life was knitted in with that of another. 'Whoever he is,' she said, 'he was born under the same star as thou wert, and his fate is thine.'"

I have sat up late to write all this. They always say that the happier some men are the more they look forward for trouble. I do not think that I am usually given that way myself, but there is one thing I would like to say to which I have made up my mind. They tell me that the first symptoms of hydrophobia often declare themselves some time, twenty-four hours even, before the actual seizure begins. Should this happen to me—and I have no certainty that it may not do so at any minute—I will just slip away out of the hotel; I will say no good-bye to her—she may think I have forsaken her; anything rather than the truth—I can easily remove from myself all marks of personal identification, and then I will know what to do.

She will never find out, even if by chance she should ever again hear of me, the real reason of my death, and she will be cheated out of that belief in our sharing the same fate, which might so work on her nerves as to bring upon her that which I would die a thousand thousand times to keep from her.

April 25th, 11.30 p.m.

I should like to finish this off. I should like to think that into whosever hands it may some day fall, it will make clear what would otherwise never be known. And perhaps after some years, whoever reads it will let her know what was the truth of it all. I have time enough for that before I lock this manuscript into my trunk and send it off by itself home again to Carrig Frass.

I have been with her all day, and we were very happy. She has promised to marry me soon—quite soon—in a few days. Mother of God, from whose work I turned my hand, give me strength.

She asked me after the *table d'hôte* dinner this evening to come to her own little sitting-room to have some tea. She handed me the cup and I raised it to my lips, but as I tried to drink there came a spasm in my throat, and I felt I could not swallow. It frightened me, but I said nothing, and we sat for a long time talking and making plans of what we would do when we were

married. Every moment that I was near her, every stir of her hand in mine, every touch of her soft cheek as she leant her head on my shoulder, sent a rush through my veins of keen love and desire to live; and even then I was beginning to know that it was for me a mockery to talk of the future.

She saw that I had not drunk my tea. "I will give you more," she said, "this is cold."

She gave it to me, and when she did not see, I tried again to drink it; and again the spasm and the rigid contraction of all the muscles in my throat. So I told her I did not care for it; and I said good-night to her; that it was late, and I had much to do before I could sleep. God knows I have much to do, but I shall sleep sound enough when it is done.

I kissed her twice, three times, as a dying man kisses a crucifix, but to me those kisses brought no hope.

It is nearly midnight and I must stop. I leave her to God—may He have mercy on my soul.

PIERCE CORMAC.

* * * * *

Extract from "Le Soir," April 26.

"This morning in a remote corner of the gardens of the Trocadéro was found the body of a young man. He had apparently committed suicide. In his hand was a revolver, one chamber of which had been fired, evidently by himself. He is very tall, and his appearance is that of a foreigner. No name or marks of identification of any kind were found upon the body, which has been taken by the police to the Morgue."

Extract from "Le Petit Journal," April 27.

"Yesterday evening in the Hospital —, a young Hungarian lady, by name Zdenka Vorschak, died of what is believed to have been rabies. The unfortunate young lady has been under the treatment of M. Pasteur, and it is apprehended that some violent shock to the nervous system, combined with her own constant dread of hydrophobia, caused a nerve crisis in which many of the phases of rabies were closely simulated. Her death was, however, unattended by the more violent symptoms of this frightful malady, and we understand that some difference of opinion prevails among the physicians as to its true cause."

"SHEBA."

A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "THE LADY NANCY,"
"GRETCHEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

"*GOTT im Himmel!*" cried old Müller, staring aghast at an agitated figure pacing to and fro their quiet sitting-room. "What say you? Marry her—marry Sheba Ormatroyd! You, the woman-hater—the anchorite! *Was ist denn mit ihr?*"

"What can I do?" said Meredith, dragging a chair up to the table and gazing moodily at his friend's face. "I love the girl—more than words can say. I have avoided her, as you know, because . . . because I feared my strength . . . It was no use—she is wretched. Her life will be ruined if she stays with those people—and the mother . . . Heavens! if you had heard her—and they seem determined to force her into the arms of this French libertine. I know enough of him. As I told you, he is behind the scenes nearly every night—and I know for a fact he has ruined that pretty little Coralie Grey, the dancer. Faugh—it is sacrilege to think of Sheba even in his presence."

"And so," said Müller gravely, "you—love—each other. I am surprised, and yet I always thought the girl looked upon you as a sort of hero. She is very romantic, you know—but she is so young. Are you sure, *lieber Freund*, that you can trust her? Remember your first lesson."

"I do," said the young man growing very pale and with a hardening of the lips that made his face look strangely stern. "I remembered it so long that I have scarcely even spoken to Sheba Ormatroyd when she has been here. It was hard enough, sometimes. Those beautiful eloquent eyes used to gaze at me so innocently and beseechingly."

"But," said Müller, lighting his big pipe as was his wont in any case of discussion, "there are complications—you remember you told me your story. Is it safe, think you, to marry without proof that you are free?"

"I have the best proof—*his word*," answered Meredith moodily. "Besides, she deserted me. She has no longer a claim."

"True," said the old German. "But if Sheba knew—would she marry you? that is the question. Women are so odd, you know, such sticklers for ceremony. And if anything should chance hereafter——"

"How could it? What nonsense you talk," exclaimed the young man impatiently. "Even if—she—were not dead as that ruffian swore, she has no legal right or claim on me, and I am not the sort of man to play the deceiver. I love Sheba Ormatroyd as I never thought to love living woman, and I would be true to her with or without legal compulsion—that I swear."

"Oh," said Müller indifferently, "as for forms and ceremonies, you know what I think of them! No man ought to marry if he cannot of himself be true to the woman he loves. Feeling *that* is absolutely certain, he needs not the mummery of a priest's words to make the union holy. But that is all very well, only would Sheba think so?"

"We can be married by a registrar," said Meredith. "There is no need for the religious ceremony at all, and no likelihood of it," he added bitterly, "for it will certainly be a case of running off with her. That mother of hers will never consent. You ought to have heard her abuse me and my position, Müller; it would have done your heart good: she looks upon music as a disgrace, it appears, and I am a sort of licensed mountebank, dressed up to sing and act at so much a night. There is a new view of your adored art for you!"

"Phoo!" said the old man contemptuously, "does the prating of fools make any difference to the laws of existence? Why waste breath in combating the ignorance of a small section of humanity? You ought to know better than to care for such pin-pricks."

"It is not that I—care," said Meredith; "I am too proud and too fond of my art to heed what such people as these Levisons say; only it surprised me somewhat to see one light in which it is viewed."

Then he rose and began his pacing of the room. "What is to be done?" he said again. "In a week I go to Queensland."

"Take her with you," said Müller, puffing huge clouds up to the ceiling.

"Easier said than done," answered Meredith gloomily.

The old man laughed. "Nay, *mein Lieber*, have you played Romeo on the stage and know not how to act it in reality?" he said. "Has not Cupid laughed at parents and guardians, and locks and bolts from time immemorial? Tell her she must decide—I make little doubt she will—and in your favour. For the rest I can play the protecting father till you are able to marry her; she will be quite safe."

"Safe!" cried Meredith hotly. "I should think so. Do you fancy I am a blackguard like Pharamond?"

"Softly, softly," said Müller, with his little smile. "I know

what it is to be young and hot-blooded, and how sometimes the very best intentions are frustrated by—nature. Then there is the law to be considered, you know. Is she of legal age to contract a marriage without consent of parents—eh? If not, will there be hue and cry and pursuit after Signor Paoletti? It won't do, you know, to ruin your professional prospects for sake of a love affair."

"There will be no fear of *that*," said Meredith. "From what I could judge of her mother's feelings she won't trouble her head about the girl—once she takes the law into her own hands. The question is—how am I to communicate with her?"

"Write, of course," said Müller.

"I fear she will not be allowed to receive letters."

"Is there no friend within the citadel?" inquired the old man. "Hard if there is not."

"I cannot tell," said Paul gloomily. "I never entered the house till to-day, and," he added fervently, "I never wish to do so again." At this moment there came a loud ring at the bell.

Müller looked up. "The post," he said. "If it should be——"

They both turned eagerly to the door, and a moment later the servant entered with a letter. Paul seized it; his brow clouded. "No," he said, "it is not her writing." He opened the envelope with languid and indifferent fingers, and glanced carelessly at its contents. Suddenly his face grew eager. "Good heavens!" he said. "Müller, listen to this:

"DEAR SIR,

"I have heard from my friend Miss Ormatroyd of the difficult position in which you are both placed. I am her great—in fact, her only—friend, and it is needless to say how deeply I feel for her. As you may suppose, Mrs. Levison has forbidden her to write to you; but I feel justified in setting at defiance so arbitrary a command. If, therefore, you wish to communicate with her you are quite at liberty to do so *through me*, for I am fortunately staying with the Levisons on a visit, and shall be only too happy to assist my poor friend, who is in a heart-broken and almost desperate state. She is to be kept a close prisoner in her own room until she agrees to accept this other suitor, of whom you have heard. It remains for you therefore to come to the rescue, if possible. At all events, let me assure you that you at least have a friend and assistant in

"Your humble servant,

"BESSIE SAXTON."

"What a curious letter," said Müller. "It sounds to me like a trap. Do you know this girl?"

"No," said Meredith, gazing with evident perturbation at the large, bold handwriting; "but I have heard Sheba speak of her,

and it opens up a possibility of communication, you see. What do you suspect?"

Müller took the letter and examined it carefully. "I should say she was not quite—true," he said thoughtfully; "but then you know I never believe in women's friendships, still less do I believe they are ready to assist one another in a love affair, unless there is some hidden motive. However, that we cannot discover yet. You had better write to Sheba under cover of this very friendly young lady. Be cautious what you say, for the letter may fall into other hands. If she receives it safely, time enough to fix your plans."

"I think," said Meredith gravely, "I will give the parents one more chance. I will write to her stepfather, and formally ask his consent. If he refuses——"

"Which he is sure to do," said Müller. "I suspect he is a led-by-the-nose husband, with a virago of a wife."

"Well," laughed Meredith, "let me give him the chance of proving his mastership. Of course if he says no also, I must ask Sheba to decide for herself."

"And if I know her at all she is just the girl to do so," said Müller, "and," he added softly, "just the girl to make you happy, my poor Paul. She has a grand nature, and God knows your life has been a hard and cold one long enough. It is time you had the comfort of a woman's love, and Sheba, ah, how she *will* love! That great, ardent, repressed soul! What treasures lie there. Happy Paul! For the first time in my grim, book-wormish, selfish life I envy youth, and hope, and passion." He laid down his pipe as he spoke, and with a short nod of farewell, went off to his own room.

Paul saw him no more that night.

* * * * *

The formal proposal to Mr. Levison was answered by the return of Meredith's own letter without any comment. It was such an insult that even the placid, easy-going old German was roused to fierce anger. As for Paul himself, he now felt at liberty to act independently of Sheba's relatives altogether, and soon a regular communication was established between them by means of Bessie Saxton.

Time was hastening on. The company had to start almost immediately for Queensland, and Mrs. Levison, knowing this, redoubled her vigilance over Sheba. Once the hateful opera people were gone, she felt she could breathe freely, and in the meantime, being utterly unsuspecting of Bessie Saxton's double-dealing, she communicated everything to that young lady.

The dinner-party was fixed for the very night that the obnoxious suitor was to start, and Mrs. Levison found she had no difficulty in persuading Count Pharamond to stay the night at Oaklands.

She had informed him that Sheba would give him a definite

reply on that occasion, and he had professed his entire willingness to wait until then.

"You see, count," said Mrs. Levison, "my daughter is very young and timid, and she has not as yet given any serious consideration to the subject of matrimony. She likes you exceedingly, however, and I must trust to your eloquence to convince her that marriage is not such a terrible ordeal after all."

The count's eyes sparkled beneath their lowered lids. "Ah, madame," he said, "how charming it is, that modest reticence, that girlish fear of—they know not what. How admirable must have been the training that leaves such freshness and purity in the virgin heart, folded like a bud which the ardent sun of love alone may open into perfect bloom."

"Yes, count, yes," said Mrs. Levison rather vaguely. "You speak like a poet, really. How admirably you will suit my dear child; she is so romantic herself."

But Pharamond was not one whit blinded by Mrs. Levison's manoeuvres. He felt sure that Sheba did not care for him in the least, and did not want to marry him. That, however, made no difference to his intentions. He was far too used to seeing marriages "arranged" in the commonplace, cold-blooded French fashion, to care whether his intended wife had any favourable regard for him, or not.

Marriage would soon settle all that girlish romantic nonsense, and he had never before seen any woman capable of inspiring that mingling of passion, desire and inaccessibility that made up Sheba's charm for him. He was determined she should be his, and the fact that she kept him off and would not at once accept his suit, rather added zest to its enforcement. The parents were on his side—as a matter of course the girl would give in also.

Meantime, he amused himself with Bessie. All that week Sheba remained a prisoner in her own room, seeing no one but her mother and Bessie Saxton. Every day Mrs. Levison formally reiterated her question, "Will you accept Count Pharamond?" and every day came the same dogged reply, "No, I will not." Mrs. Levison grew alarmed as the day of the dinner-party drew nigh. Sheba must appear at it, and she had told the count he should have his answer then.

She felt assured that no communication had taken place between Sheba and Meredith, yet she felt at a loss to account for the girl's radiant looks and obstinate firmness. Was it possible that she had some hope, some scheme for deliverance? Bessie Saxton laughed and assured her it was impossible, still when the night really arrived Mrs. Levison was in a state of fever and anxiety, that even sal-volatile and other remedies could not quite allay. As the hour struck, and one by one the invited guests assembled, she grew even more nervous.

Pharamond appeared, calm, radiant and hopeful, and dressed

with his usual exquisite care. Then, as Mrs. Levison's nervous glance went from the clock to the door, it was thrown open and Bessie Saxton and Sheba entered the room.

Sheba wore the same dress that she had worn when Pharamond had first seen her, and he thought she looked even more lovely. There was a repressed fire—a something wild, eager, excited about the girl that stimulated his jaded passions, and lent her additional charm.

He greeted her almost as a lover, and her cold return of his words and looks in no way damped their ardour.

"It will be something to fire and change all that," he said to himself, with a little fierce exultant glow at his heart. "It will not last, of course, any more than the bloom of the peach—still, mine will be the lips to kiss off the bloom. For the rest—*n'importe*."

Then dinner was announced, and for the first time in her life Sheba laid her hand on his proffered arm, and followed by many a curious and watchful gaze went out of the room by his side.

All during dinner she scarcely spoke. Only now and then her eyes—frightened and full of dread—turned to Bessie Saxton, who was seated opposite. Then, as if deriving comfort or encouragement from that source, she would resume her pretence of eating, or again return to those stiff monosyllabic replies which was all the response she made to the count's eloquence. It amused him to watch her blushes and her evident distress, just as it added zest to his dinner to glance at a tiny note under cover of his *serviette*—a note which had been slipped into his hand as he had greeted Bessie Saxton.

"*Diablo!*" he thought, "she gets imprudent. However, it is not for me to say nay to the caprices of a pretty woman."

When the long wearisome meal was over, he contrived to hold the door open for the ladies to pass through, and as Bessie Saxton passed, he whispered low and hurriedly in her ear, "An hour after midnight."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BAFFLED.

WHEN Pharamond re-entered the drawing-room, flushed with wine and bearing himself as a victorious conqueror, he saw that neither Sheba nor Bessie Saxton were there.

Mrs. Levison approached him with apologetic murmurs. "My poor child is suffering with a severe headache," she said; "she begs me to make her excuses. She will see you to-morrow morning in the library at ten o'clock."

Pharamond concealed his disappointment skilfully. He had

fully expected to have the girl's answer to-night. However, a few hours, he told himself, would not be long in passing, and then——

Still his brow looked dark and ominous, the girl was taking too much on herself. He wondered what had made Bessie Saxton retire so early. It was unusual, and it left him to his own resources. He did not like the assembled guests, there was a vulgarity—a self-consciousness about them that grated on his nerves—for bad as his moral character might be, Pharamond was fastidious about society and knew at a glance the difference between social veneer and the real article. He felt decidedly bored, and welcomed most cordially the departure of the last guest and his consequent freedom. He at once retired to his own room, escorted by his servile host. Once there he threw off his dress coat and stiff tie, and putting on a loose soft dressing-gown, established himself in an easy-chair with a cigar, and a French novel.

Silence began to fall over the house. Footsteps died away along the corridors, doors opened and shut, lights were extinguished; Pharamond still read and smoked, and from time to time glanced at the clock ticking loudly on the marble mantelpiece. At last he drew forth a small scented note and once more attentively studied its directions; then approaching the lamp, he lit the paper by its flame and let it slowly smoulder into ashes.

As he did so the clock chimed the hour after midnight. He turned the lamp low, and going to his door, opened it and looked out. The passage was all in darkness. He re-entered his room, lit a candle, and holding it in his hand went out once more and stood in the carpeted corridor, looking down its dark and silent length.

"The third door on the right," he muttered as he blew out the light and placed the candlestick within his own doorway. "*Pardieu!* I don't half like it. If it should be a trick."

* * * * *

Meanwhile Mr. Levison had been detained by one excuse and another from seeking his own dressing-room. His wife had so much to say and to consult him about, that she appeared unwilling he should think of retiring, and even permitted him to smoke his post-prandial cigar in the sacredness of her own luxurious chamber. But the cigar was burnt out, and Mr. Levison's prolonged yawns gave evidence of a growing inclination to pay his devotions to the drowsy god, when suddenly there pealed through the silent house a long piercing shriek.

He started to his feet. Mrs. Levison faced him white and trembling.

"Good God!" he cried. "What's that?"

His wife snatched up a candle and rushed down the corridor; he wondered that she made straight for Sheba's room. It seemed to

him that the cry had come from the other end of the passage, and he ran to a door through which he saw a gleam of light.

Pushing it open unceremoniously, he found himself face to face with Count Pharamond, who, livid with rage and consternation, was supporting in his arms the seemingly unconscious figure of Bessie Saxton!

Her fair hair streamed over her bare white shoulders—her eyes were closed—the loose muslin gown she wore had fallen open at the throat . . . Mr. Levison stared aghast and horror-stricken at the sight.

Then for one brief instant, the instinct of manhood mastered prudence and policy. He sprang forward, and seizing the Frenchman by the throat, he shook him till his teeth chattered like castanets.

"What the devil does this mean?" he shouted fiercely. "How dare you bring your d—d French manners into a respectable house! This young lady is in my charge—under my roof. What are you doing here at this hour?"

Like a beaten cur, yet with rage struggling for supremacy, Pharamond stood there livid and speechless.

Bessie had fallen to the ground—not ungracefully—at the moment when Mr. Levison seized her supporter, and there lay white and still and in picturesque disarray, the first object on which Mrs. Levison's eyes fell as, attracted by the noise, she too rushed into the room.

For a moment she stood there speechless. The blood rushed into her face; shame, disgust and baffled fury thrilled her by turns. The one explanation that seemed possible to herself, showed that she had been the dupe of cleverer and more scheming brains, and the sight of that still white figure seemed to incense her more than the unexplained outrage incensed her indignant husband.

As for Pharamond, he remained absolutely speechless.

When Levison saw his wife, he motioned to her to attend to Bessie, then turning to his guest, he said in a low, fierce tone, "Now, sir, follow me; this must be explained at once."

And Pharamond, with one bitter glance of baffled rage at the still immovable figure, sullenly bowed his head and followed his host from the room.

* * * * *

It was a long time before Mrs. Levison's efforts to restore the unconscious girl were rewarded with success, and when at last Bessie opened her eyes, she appeared far too terrified and exhausted to give any explanation of this occurrence.

She fell from one hysterical fit into another, and Mrs. Levison was well-nigh distracted. She dared not call for assistance, as she was terrified lest the servants should gain any knowledge of the

scandal, and between her fury at the miscarriage of her own plot, and her wrath at Bessie's foolish behaviour and Pharamond's incomprehensible conduct, her state of mind was not enviable.

When the girl at last grew calm and Mrs. Levison could leave her for a moment, she flew in search of her husband.

He was pacing the corridor alone, gloomy and perturbed.

"How is she now?" he asked eagerly as he saw his wife approaching.

"Oh," cried Mrs. Levison impatiently, "she is right enough—what I want to know is where Sheba has gone. She was not in her room when I went there just now. Have you seen her?"

"Not in her room," echoed Mr. Levison wonderingly. "Gracious! has every one gone mad to-night?" He hurried off, his wife following; suddenly he stopped. "By the way," he said, "what made you go to her room? The cry came from the other end of the corridor."

Mrs. Levison looked confused. "I—I thought it came from there," she stammered. She could not say that she had *expected* it to come from there.

They opened the door and went into the room. It was untenanted. The bed had not been slept in. Sheba's evening dress was flung carelessly on it, and as Mrs. Levison rushed from place to place, her cries and exclamations conveyed her fears.

"She has run away, I am sure of it. See—her hat is gone—and her cloak—and her every-day dresses—her linen—her boots . . . Oh, the wicked, treacherous girl—so much for her seeming obedience . . . and after all my plans . . . Oh, what am I to do? . . . What am I to do?"

"Do?" echoed her husband stupidly. "Well, for that matter we can't do anything. She's evidently bolted and that's an end of it. The other case is far more serious. Mr. Saxton confided his daughter to my care. How can I look him in the face after such a disgraceful business? . . . The only thing now is for Pharamond to marry her. It's plain Sheba won't have him. I suppose he's not quite a blackguard, and will make the only reparation a gentleman can."

Mrs. Levison sat up in the chair into which she had fallen, and stared at him in utter stupefaction. "*What* are you saying?" she gasped. "Pharamond marry Bessie . . ." Then a light seemed to break in upon her and her face grew white and set. . . . "I see it all—now," she muttered. "They have both conspired to dupe me. Bessie has helped Sheba to elope with this singer, and it suited her to compromise herself so as to gain the count . . . The vile, bold scheming girl, and I . . . I have been playing into her hand all the time!"

Which in fact was the case, though like many other vain and self-confident people, Mrs. Levison had never dreamed that she was being used as the cat's-paw was used for the roasted chestnuts,

until the scorch of the fire quickened her feelings, and betrayed her folly.

By the next morning every one in the house knew that Sheba Ormatroyd had left her parents' roof, and most of them had heard Mr. Levison's heartily expressed satisfaction at the event, and his declaration that he was deuced glad to be rid of his troublesome step-daughter. In vain Mrs. Levison begged him to follow, or try to find some trace of her; in vain she wept and bemoaned her hard fate during the whole of that day. Her husband was inexorable. He raged and swore. He said that as Sheba had gone off with this man she must abide by the consequences. He never wished to hear of her, or see her again. She had been nothing but a worry and annoyance to him ever since she had been under his roof. He was thankful to wash his hands of her and her affairs once and for all—and the sooner her mother came to his way of thinking the better.

The affair of Bessie Saxton was to his mind much more serious. He had a great respect for Mr. Saxton, and a genuine admiration for the bright, rattling, and amusing Bessie. That such an insult should have been offered to her under his roof angered him far more than Sheba's escapade.

He had "had it out" with the count, to use his own expression, and that high and mighty individual had found himself—for once—fairly taken to task for his profligacy and utterly unable to frame a tenable excuse for what had happened. When Mr. Levison had stormed himself out, there was nothing for it but to say he would do whatever the young lady wished, but having said it, he registered a vow that Bessie should yet pay dearly enough for her trick. Of course it was a trick. He never doubted it now, but he felt none the less furious because he had been duped by it.

As for Bessie herself, she remained in her room all day. No one came near her save Mrs. Levison's maid with an occasional offer of service, or refreshment. Towards dusk, however, she received a note from Mr. Levison and the sight of its contents seemed to restore her to her usual spirits. It was brief, but to the point:

"DEAR MISS SAXTON,

"I feel as if I could never forgive myself for what has happened under my roof, but set your mind at rest. He has promised to marry you as soon as you are willing. Will you give him an interview in my presence and that of Mrs. Levison, at five o'clock this afternoon, to arrange everything? Rest assured I shall never permit a breath of scandal to touch your name, and Pharamond knows it.

"Faithfully yours,

"J. LEVISON

Bessie's eyes sparkled. The languor and indifference left her. She rose from the couch and dressed herself with unusual simplicity, but also with unusual good taste.

There was something chaste, saddened, subdued about her, quite in keeping with her position, as she glided into the library in the falling dusk.

Mr. Levison advanced to meet her with a fatherly and protecting air. His wife, who was seated on a low chair by the window, coldly extended her hand. Pharamond himself moved forward, and bowed low before the white and stately figure. But she met his eye, and a sudden pang of fear blanched her cheek and made her limbs tremble.

"My dear Miss Saxton," said Mr. Levison tenderly, "there is an old proverb that says: 'Least said—soonest mended.' I quite agree with it. In the absence of your father I am here to lay before you the proposal of Count Pharamond. Will you marry him at as early a date as convenient to yourself? he wishes to return to his own land immediately."

Bessie raised her drooping head and looked straight and fearlessly into the count's evil eyes. "Monsieur de Pharamond does me honour," she said quietly. "I accept his proposal."

The Frenchman advanced, and bowed over the hand which he raised to his lips. "Mademoiselle, you have made me the happiest of men," he murmured mendaciously.

The girl withdrew her hand and moved away to the seat where Mrs. Levison was watching the scene. She sank down beside her. "You must forgive me," she murmured in a low, agitated voice. "I—I can explain all; Sheba would never have married him—never—and he . . . Oh! how can I tell you?—he owes it me. I had to do it to . . . to save myself . . . You must not blame me too severely—for I loved him, and he made me believe he loved me. Oh, dear Mrs. Levison, I have no mother . . . no other friend here . . . say you will forgive me, and be my friend as—as you have always been. You know how fond I am of you . . . don't turn against me now."

And Mrs. Levison was so startled and so amazed, and, in a way, so touched by this confession, and the girl's tears and kisses and broken words, that she almost forgot her rage and indignation of the previous night, and ended by promising forgiveness. Mr. Saxton was written to that night—so was Aunt Allison, and Bessie informed Pharamond that with her relatives' sanction she would be prepared to marry him that day month.

She would not see him alone for a single moment, and he left Oaklands and went back to his own rooms in Sydney, feeling that for once in his life he had been outwitted. The feeling was not a pleasant one. He was furious with Sheba, and still more furious with Bessie; but, bad as he was at heart, he had kept her secret, and was prepared to atone for the scandal he had brought upon

her name. A marriage—such a marriage—would not lie very heavily on his sense of moral obligation, so he told himself, and he knew very well that the girl who had outwitted him now, would repent in dust and ashes the day that made her legally his own.

She had gained her object; for the rest, the future would show who would repent most that that object *had* been gained.

CHAPTER XL.

PERIL.

It was full summer.

In the towns people panted and groaned under the burden of a heat which made life scarce endurable. Even up among the hills in the great sheltered bush districts it was bad enough; but there was a possibility of shade and coolness that was impossible in the vigour of busy streets, and unsheltered pavements.

Beyond the shores of Port Philip, and leaving the city far out of sight, stood a low, rambling wooden building—more like a farmhouse than anything else—surrounded by a forest of the invariable eucalyptus trees.

The verandah was almost buried beneath a profusion of creepers, and was dark and cool even in the hot summer afternoon. A few bamboo chairs were scattered about, a low wicker table was covered with books and papers. All the windows were opened and showed the rooms beyond, furnished with a simplicity almost primitive, their only decoration being the lavish display of flowers which stood about in great bowls, or wreathed with overhanging tendrils the wooden brackets on the whitewashed walls. Through one of the windows opening on to the verandah, a girl stepped suddenly, and advancing to the opening where the creepers were curtained off, she looked eagerly out in the direction of the fields beyond.

They were gold now with ripened corn, and beyond the strong rough palings the "bush" stretched in great uneven patches, waiting for further cultivation.

Two or three cows were lying lazily down amidst the short dry grass; at intervals a dog barked, and a bird gave vent to a shrill, clear note, otherwise the stillness was intense as the heat.

The girl shaded her eyes from the sun with one hand, and then apparently distinguishing what she expected, turned aside and began clearing away the litter of books and papers from the table. A little soft smile hovered about her lips, her eyes shone with a steadfast, happy light that made them wondrously beautiful.

The girl, in fact, was no other than Sheba Ormatroyd—but a very changed Sheba Ormatroyd from the one who had fled away in the secrecy of night to the care and protection of a man of whom

she knew indeed very little; but for whom she had a love boundless as her trust, and faith, and passionate devotion.

The change was such a change as only shows itself in a face that is the mirror of the soul, and Sheba's soul had, as it were, rushed into life and feeling and knowledge, with one bound.

Freedom had come to her; love had come to her; the gifts of the tree of knowledge had come to her; and all that had been crushed and hidden and subdued so long, seemed to have burst forth into a magnificent vitality that gave her the grandest dower of womanhood—peace of mind, and beauty of soul. Presently a step made her turn round, on her face that flush and glow of welcome that only comes with the advent of what is beloved.

"It is you, Paul, at last. I thought I saw you coming. What have you done with Müller?"

"I left him talking to Black Joe. One of their usual arguments."

The girl laughed—a bright happy laugh that had the true ring of mirth in it. She still busied herself preparing the table, but the flush on her cheek betrayed consciousness, and there was a little nervous tremor about the busy hands.

He watched her silently; then, as if obeying some mastering impulse, he suddenly approached and drew her to his side and looked down into her eyes with a long, eager, passionate look—the look of one who rather asks for assurance of love, than acknowledges its certainty.

"Oh! my dearest," he murmured, and stooped and touched her lips eagerly and yet with a certain fear that seemed to chill the caress.

She clung to him for a moment in a silent half-pathetic way. "What is it, Paul?" she asked timidly. "Nothing has happened?"

. . . No fresh trouble?"

"No," he said and gently stroked the thick dark hair from her brow. "Nothing fresh. I should think," and he laughed bitterly, "that fate had about done her worst for us. There could hardly be anything else to happen, after—"

"Oh, hush," she interrupted, and raised her head from his shoulder, and stood facing him with the warm colour flushing her soft cheeks. "Have we not agreed to forget that? Why should it trouble you? . . ."

"It does trouble me," he said gravely. "How could it be otherwise? Night and day I think of it. God knows I would sooner have forfeited my own life than done you wrong . . . and now look what I have made of yours."

"Oh, Paul—Paul!" she cried brokenly. "Have I not told you again and again that to be near you, within sight of your face and sound of your voice, is enough for my happiness? . . . I would not go back to the old misery, the old dumb, repressed, cheerless life, not for all the wealth and honour the world could give. And

after all," she added softly, "it was not your fault. I will never allow that."

"No," he said with a heavy sigh, "not my fault that the dead returned—but mine that has placed you in such a position; not mine that I love you and that you love me, and yet . . . we scarcely dare to speak of it."

"What matters that?" she said lifting those great glorious eyes to his own. "We know it—we *feel* it. It is as the air we breathe—the light of our days. It is about us and around us . . . that is enough—for me," she added very low.

He drew her to him once again with a reverent and hesitating grace. . . . "Oh," he said softly, "how generous women are when they love; and how little men deserve that they should be. . . . If I had but known you sooner . . . if the past could be undone——"

Her colour changed, she trembled from head to foot. "It cannot," she said brokenly. "When you came to me that night . . . and told me the story of your life . . . and how, as if in very mockery, that face had crossed your path again, and that it was not possible to fulfil your promise until you were sure you were free . . . as you had believed . . . I told you I was perfectly content to trust you and—wait. But nothing could have induced me to go home—to such a home. That last piece of treachery, the cruel trick that was to decoy me into that man's loathsome arms, was the finishing stroke to all I had borne so long. I would have begged my bread sooner than owe food or shelter to them, ever again. I told you so . . . And then Müller came forward and said he would be my father and protector, and so I took the old place, dear Paul, and became your child's teacher once more; and we have been very happy and merry over our new relationship, and so we might always be, it seems to me, for I want nothing on earth save to know you love me, and to feel you are near me."

"Because," he said, "you are but a girl, and innocent and pure, and easily content, and I verily believe you care nothing for the world, or what it would say or think."

"The world," she laughed gaily. "Fancy the world and—Sheba Ormatroyd! How incongruous. It is not even aware of her existence."

"Still," he insisted, "when you gain more wisdom you may blame me, and then—well, then I should kill myself, I think, for I could never bear to hear you reproach me, Sheba. God knows I am no coward, but to think I have such a life as yours to answer for—to see its gifts and treasures thrown at my feet, and yet to feel that I am making such base use of them. . . ."

"Paul," she cried, "you will break my heart if you speak so. Listen to me. Perhaps you don't understand how I love you—how I feel that to you I owe every joy I have ever known. It

is not easy for me to express myself and words seem poor and weak when one wants them to say what is in one's very soul—one's whole life and being. *Nothing* you could do would seem to me wrong . . . how could it? That you love me is as wonderful to me now as it was the first hour I heard it, and that fact alone is enough. . . . I care for nothing else. . . ."

"But you will," he said, "some day . . . and then you will say I did you a great wrong——"

"Never," she said solemnly as she lifted her eyes to his. "I am safe—at rest—happy. True, as Müller says, it is not always easy to act brother and sister, but save for some chance outbreak . . . like . . . like this, Paul, we have done it very successfully. It is understood that we love each other . . . it is also understood that as soon as freedom comes to you, I am ready to be your wife. Till then I do not find it hard to live our free, careless Bohemian life. These past months have held for me perfect unclouded happiness."

"And so," he said passionately, "they have for me. Still, Sheba, you do not understand that sometimes it is hard. A man's love is not like a woman's."

"I suppose," she said sadly, "I do not content you as you do me."

"Perhaps," he said, softly kissing her eyes, "you content me so much that I become—discontented. Forgive me, dear; I have no right to say so much. It was not in our agreement, was it? But for a whole week I have not had a word with you alone, not a kiss—not anything to satisfy my restless heart, save some shy fleeting look from those glorious eyes. How I love your eyes, Sheba!"

"Do you?" she said laughing, yet crimsoning beneath his gaze. "I am glad of it—glad and proud that thy hand-maiden has found grace in thy sight, my lord."

"Don't," he whispered passionately; "you must not be humble to me—the colder, the prouder, the better."

"And yet," she said, "just now you seemed to blame me because I was—distant."

"Well," he said half laughing, "a week is too long, and Müller is a veritable watch-dog. I wonder how he came to spare us this *tête-à-tête* to-day. Probably he thought you were having a *siesta* like Paul."

"It was too hot to sleep," she said, "so I came out here."

"I am thankful for that small mercy," he said, smiling down at her. "Oh, Sheba, Sheba, what blushes are those. Tell me again you are happy."

"You are insatiable, Paul," she said, drawing herself away from his eager arms. "I have told you enough for one day—too much—and yet why should I fear to tell it you again? I might as well deny I breathe, as that I love you——"

"Darling," he cried, "it is more than I deserve, God knows!"

"And—loving you," she went on, her eyes kindling and the brilliant colour glowing in either cheek, "has made me, I think, in love with life. I am no more myself. I am never alone, never unhappy. I have learned there is something worth living for—dying for—the one great and glorious gift Heaven gives to earth and has given to me—to love, and be beloved."

Then suddenly she paused, as if ashamed. "I say too much," she cried, and trembled and turned away because there was that in his face which frightened her for the self-control that had always been between them as yet, and because she had begun dimly to understand that love to a man has less of the divine and more of the mortal in its nature, than ever it has to a woman. He was still a god to her, and she worshipped him as such, but she to him held all that was beautiful and accessible even amidst her divinity. Therein lay the danger that as yet neither would acknowledge, but that made itself felt in moments such as these.

Sheba's position was indeed a critical and a strange one. When Bessie Saxton had told her of the proposed plan to force her into compliance with her mother's desires, she had felt such loathing and horror as made her almost desperate. Then and there she had decided upon leaving home as Meredith had entreated her to do, and with Bessie's help it had been easily managed.

It was when they had arrived at Brisbane, that Paul found his plans were destined to be overthrown. He sang with his usual success to a crowded house and an enthusiastic audience. Sheba was not present, being too fatigued with the long journey. At the close of the opera a bouquet was thrown to him from a side box. He picked it up and glanced at the place from which it had come. One glance—that was all—but it turned his life to tragedy. It sent him sick and reeling to his dressing-room like one seized with a mortal illness. It told him that the woman who had been his life's evil genius, who had deserted and betrayed him and her child, and had left him for dead while she fled with her low-born paramour—that this woman, his wife still since the law had bound them and had yet to dis sever those bonds, was alive and well, and to all appearance in the enjoyment of affluence and luxury. The shock was all the more terrible in that it was so utterly unexpected.

And yet is it not always "the unexpected that happens?" It was only a very old story repeated. A young man's mad folly and its consequences; having their resurrection just as he had begun to assure himself they were for ever dead and buried.

He had quarrelled with his father on this girl's account; had married her and brought her out to the colonies in the full confidence of finding wealth and fortune. And this was the end. The woman had wearied of the struggle for riches, and had fled from her husband with a gold-digger whom fortune had lavishly favoured.

He had followed them from place to place, partly with the brute instinct of vengeance, partly with the resolve of getting back the child. He had found her at last; there had been a desperate quarrel, and she had drawn her pistol and deliberately shot him and left him for dead. From that time he heard nothing of her until one night in the Sydney streets he came across the drunken ruffian who had been her companion. The man, who was in the last stage of *delirium tremens*, had been just picked up out of the harbour, where he had thrown himself, under the impression that his clothes were on fire. They were taking him to the hospital when Meredith saw and recognized him. He died at noon next day, confessing to Paul, who sat beside him, that his guilty wife was also dead, having been drowned in a boating accident two years before on the Murray River.

Paul believed the story, which indeed seemed authentic enough and was verified by newspaper accounts, as well as the oath of a dying man. Perhaps the man believed it also. It was too late to determine that now, but Meredith only learnt its falsity when too late to repair the wrong he had all unconsciously wrought on another innocent life.

In utter desperation he took what seemed to him the best and only course. He confessed the whole miserable story to Sheba herself, without extenuation or plea of any sort. He fully expected she would at once leave him and go back to her parents, perhaps even in time marry the hated and objectionable Pharamond. But no such thought crossed the girl's mind.

She was too utterly unconventional to regard the matter as one more worldly and experienced would have regarded it. She saw in Paul Meredith a victim, not an offender; and she was young and pure, and strong, and brave, and she loved him with all her great ardent soul. That love seemed to give her a right to be near him, to comfort him when he needed comfort, to strengthen him when he was weak and unhappy.

"I will not leave you," she had said when he had told her all, and told her too that now the choice must rest with herself, until such time as he could free himself from the dishonouring entanglement that still held him. "I will be your sister . . . and Müller shall still be my father. I am not afraid, Paul. The world is nothing to me—and its opinions less. I love you and I can trust you, and there is no one else in all the wide earth to whom I can say those words."

Then he had knelt at her feet, as one kneels to a saint, and the tears had rushed to his eyes as brokenly and feebly he tried to thank her.

"As there is a God above," he murmured below his breath, "you shall never repent that trust."

So it had come to pass that they were all staying for a brief summer holiday in this wild bush nook. No one had asked any

questions as to the relationship between the young girl and the two men, it being generally supposed that Sheba was the daughter of the old German, and Paul a relation of both.

They were essentially a very happy quartet. Müller was devoted to the girl, and she expanded mentally and physically under the genial influence, the sheltering love, and universal content and peacefulness of that home atmosphere. The child adored her, and the consciousness of Paul's love was like perpetual sunshine. But Paul himself was not happy, and gradually she began to perceive it. He was restless, gloomy, absent; and at times she grew fearful as to whether his love for her was the deep absorbing thing that she had imagined.

In that doubt she wronged him. He loved her as he had never thought it was in him to love woman again after that one terrible lesson; but he knew that the less he spoke of, or betrayed that love, the better it would be for both their sakes. He had schooled himself to be her brother and comrade; it was only now and then that the fire would burst forth, and he would become lover as well.

Müller watched them with argus eyes, having indeed formed so strong and deep an attachment to the girl that he began to regard her as his own daughter. He knew well enough the peril in which they both stood—that conventionalities were apt to be irksome—that their sips of companionship created but a fiercer thirst—that to be young, passionate and beloved was an exquisite happiness, but yet an imminent danger.

And there were times, when watching them both, and noting only too clearly how the mere presence or contact of either was enough to transfigure the simplest phase of their daily lives, he would ask himself—half fearful of a reply he dared not give—“How will it end?”

(To be continued.)

A LADY NOVELIST.

BY DENZIL VANE,

AUTHOR OF “FROM THE DEAD,” “LIKE LUCIFER,” ETC.

LADY ARAMINTA FITZAZURE was secretly dissatisfied with her position in society. She burned for a wider renown than that of being a mere woman of fashion, who gave the most delightful garden-parties and the most epicurean little dinners in London.

“Now-a-days one must really do something or be something out of the common to be a real social success—that is, to be raised above the common herd,” she said plaintively to her great ally, pretty Mrs. Jonquil.

Mrs. Jonquil's set was not quite so exclusive as that of Lady Araminta, but the latter found her chosen ally very useful sometimes. Mrs. Jonquil's acquaintance among literary and artistic people was large and varied—she even prided herself on a certain Bohemian flavouring in her gatherings at her charming house in South Kensington.

Whenever Lady Araminta wished to secure a "celebrity" to play the part of lion and roar gently for the delectation and amusement of her own particular clique, Mrs. Jonquil could generally secure the coveted personage. In a word, Mrs. Jonquil was a sort of social jackal to her more aristocratic friend; and to her, therefore, Lady Araminta had recourse in her present trouble.

"Be a little more explicit, dear," said the jackal sweetly. "Just explain exactly what you want to do, and then perhaps I may be able to help you."

"The fact is I have no definite idea what I do wish; but I am tired of my present prosaic existence."

"What an *enfant gâté* you are! Surely you are not discontented with life?" said Mrs. Jonquil, with a touch of irony too fine for the other to see. The jackal was a trifle jealous of the lion's superior social status and rather more than a trifle pleased to hear that even a lady in her own right is sometimes dissatisfied with her lot.

"But indeed I am," cried her ladyship dolefully. "I want excitement."

"Go to Monte Carlo," said the other concisely.

"I have tried that; but I lost a lot of money, and, in short, I found that form of excitement unsatisfactory—and expensive."

"Try roughing it abroad—of course not in places where you are likely to meet your friends."

"Where do I escape them?" said her ladyship sighing. "People go everywhere now-a-days. Besides, I don't like roughing it; I like my comforts," she added, glancing round at the luxurious furnishing of her boudoir.

"Wait a minute, and let me think," said the jackal, wrinkling her pretty white forehead.

After a brief period of reflection, she looked up quickly and said, "Write a novel!"

Lady Araminta started, but did not rebuff this suggestion as she had the other two.

"It would give me a great deal of trouble," she said dubiously.

"But then think of the excitement of seeing yourself in print, and of being cut up in the *Rhadamanthine*."

"I don't see the fun of that," put in Lady Araminta, tossing her head.

"Don't you? Well, that is just what I should enjoy—it must be the *sauce piquante* of authorship."

"But think of the trouble of writing a novel."

Mrs. Jonquil bent forward and fixed her bright eyes on her friend.

"That is easily obviated," she said mysteriously. "Keep a secretary, and make him write it. Why should you work yourself if you have money to pay some one else to do it for you? *Pas si bête*," added Mrs. Jonquil, shrugging her shoulders. She was fond of airing her French, which was excellent.

"That is not such a bad idea—particularly if the secretary were nice."

"I know a really charming man, young, good-looking, clever and amusing—the very person to write a society novel."

"Then why in the world hasn't he written one and made himself famous?"

"Not clever enough for that, and too poor. While the grass was growing the horse would be starving, and that sort of thing, you know. But if you, dear Araminta, paid him two or three guineas a week to come here and write from dictation, he would be delighted. I dare say he would help you with the grammar and any little trick of writing you might not know of, plot and incidents and dialogue, and so on. You would be doing a charitable action and amusing yourself at the same time. The book, too, would certainly be a success; middle-class people would be enthusiastic about it—a novel by a lady of title affords them a sort of vicarious way of mixing in Society, with a capital S, you know."

"Well, I'll think about it," said Lady Araminta thoughtfully. "It would certainly be very nice to win fame as an author; and the secretary idea is not so bad."

Mrs. Jonquil's handsome eyes were fixed on the other's face, with a look half of contempt, half of satire.

"Have luncheon with me to-morrow, dear," she said rising. "Your literary Mentor that-is-to-be shall be there to meet you."

The next day Lady Araminta drove to Mrs. Jonquil's house in very good spirits. The idea of appearing before the public in the character of an author had many attractions for her. It would raise her above the level of the ordinary run of ladies of fashion; it would give her not only social prestige as a clever and accomplished woman, but would bring her a certain sort of celebrity outside her own circle. The latter thought was so pleasing to her that she resolved to carry out Mrs. Jonquil's suggestion without delay, if the proposed secretary were at all presentable.

In Mrs. Jonquil's drawing-room was only one other guest, a tall, handsome young man, well-dressed and well-mannered, whom the hostess introduced as "Mr. Marpenn." Could this be the impetuous scribbler of whom Mrs. Jonquil had spoken? At luncheon nothing was said on the all-important subject; Mr. Marpenn talked well on all sorts of topics, and seemed thoroughly *au courant* with the doings of the great world. But later, when the trio had adjourned to Mrs. Jonquil's morning-room, the whole thing was satisfactorily arranged. Mr. Marpenn was engaged by

her ladyship as her private secretary at a salary of three guineas a week, with the promise of a handsome honorarium if the projected novel proved a success.

* * *

Lady Araminta's husband had been a Manchester cotton-spinner, but at the time of his marriage had severed all connection with the paternal business. He had the greatest regard for his aristocratic wife and her large assortment of relations; but he was determined to be always master in his own house. Naturally he did not approve of the appointment of a young and handsome man as his wife's private secretary. When her ladyship informed him that her literary work rendered such a functionary a necessity, he asked crossly why she wasted her time on such stuff? Weren't there novels enough and to spare without hers, and if she must indulge a taste for that sort of thing, what did she want a secretary for—why didn't she do the work herself?

To these and many other questions Lady Araminta replied sweetly though firmly that Mr. Marpenn's assistance was indispensable, but that when the novel was safely through the press he should be dismissed. When the Fitzazures left town for Scotland the private secretary accompanied them; later on, in the autumn, he was domiciled at Fitzazure Abbey, and in the intervals of literary work enjoyed some excellent shooting. The novel did not progress very rapidly, for Mr. Marpenn thoroughly appreciated the luxury of his new quarters; and Lady Araminta found her secretary a most useful right-hand man—he filled the rôle of tame-cat to admiration; he helped her get up theatricals and *tableaux*, and was always ready to fetch and carry for her. Some of the strait-laced county people shrugged their shoulders and muttered something about a *cavaliere servente*; but the more good-natured supposed it was all right "as Fitzazure didn't seem to mind."

At last Lady Araminta herself awoke to the fact that people were talking about her. Having always kept herself clear of scandal, and honestly hating notoriety of that sort, she began to hurry the dilatory Marpenn through his task, and early in the spring the novel was completed and in the publisher's hands.

But like Sindbad's old man of the sea, Mr. Marpenn was not easily to be got rid of. He reminded her ladyship that the book must be seen through the press—"proof-sheet correcting was most anxious and monotonous work; he was quite sure Lady Araminta would not like that part of authorship."

With a sigh Lady Araminta consented to the secretary's continued residence in Eaton Place. Her husband grumbled and told her plainly that he would no longer tolerate Mr. Marpenn's presence there. Something very like a serious quarrel between this hitherto model couple was the result. Lady Araminta obstinately stood her ground and in the end carried her point—adding

as a concession that her secretary should dine in the library in future.

At last the proof-sheets of the novel were corrected; the novel went to press, and the secretary's labours being concluded he took his departure from Eaton Place. But somehow the inextinguishable Marpenn was always dropping in on all sorts of pretexts. Having once allowed him to establish himself on the footing of a friend, it was really impossible for Lady Araminta to dismiss him like a servant.

When the novel was published, the pseudo-authoress was so delighted that she forgot all her vexations. With one or two exceptions the reviews were favourable, and Mr. Marpenn heard, with secret amusement, loud praise lavished on "dear Lady Araminta's clever book." The loudest in this chorus of adulation was a certain critic who had been particularly censorious in his judgment of a book written by the secretary during the previous year and published under a *nom-de-plume*.

"Give you my word, sir," he said to Marpenn at dinner one night at Mrs. Jonquil's; "Lady Araminta's book shows really remarkable talent, great insight into character, elegant writing and—and knowledge of society. A brilliant work—really a brilliant work."

Marpenn smiled and said he thought it was.

At all events, whatever its merits or demerits, the book had a large sale, and a second edition was issued. The handsome honorarium promised by Lady Araminta was duly bestowed on the secretary, "and now," thought her ladyship, "surely I am done with him."

But Mr. Marpenn was not to be so easily "done with."

"No, my lady," he said to himself with a disagreeable smile after an attempt at a snub on Lady Araminta's part, "you have had your triumph and you shall pay for it. Why should you derive not only praise but pecuniary benefit from my work? You will not find me very easy to shake off."

Then he began a systematic course of levying black-mail on the luckless lady novelist, and cheques—for much larger amounts than those received by Lady Araminta from her publishers—were frequently made payable to Herbert Marpenn. Mr. Fitzazure was at last made aware of the persecution and extortion to which his wife was being subjected.

"Araminta! it is really time we should arrive at an understanding," he said one day, coming into her boudoir with an open letter in his hand, "if things have come to such a pass that some confounded scoundrel thinks it necessary to write me an anonymous letter——"

"An anonymous letter!" echoed Lady Araminta feebly. "Oh, Tom! surely not about—me?"

"Well, read it for yourself and see," said the angry husband,

thrusting it into her hand. "Mind, I don't say I believe a word of it, but it isn't a pleasant thing for a man to hear about his wife."

"Oh, Tom!" cried her ladyship with flaming cheeks, when she had glanced hurriedly through the letter, "it is shameful—and all untrue, I swear to you!" And she burst into tears.

"I told you I didn't believe it," repeated Mr. Fitzazure, "but as I say, it is not pleasant to be told that your wife has been seen at Richmond, dining at the 'Stars and Stripes' with a wretched literary hack——"

"I will never see him again," sobbed her ladyship. "Oh, Tom! you can't think what misery that man has caused me!"

"But, my dear, why in the world——"

"Why has he a hold over me?" she interrupted passionately. "I will confess everything to you, if you will promise to forgive me for my deceit——"

Poor Mr. Fitzazure's ruddy face turned ghastly white. He had always believed so thoroughly in his wife, and their married life had been far happier than the majority. Yet her words would bear a very ugly interpretation.

"Araminta," he said sternly, "whatever you have to confess, don't keep me in suspense; tell me the worst at once."

"I—I did not write my novel," said her ladyship in a very small voice.

Mr. Fitzazure's brow cleared and he heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Oh! Is that all!" he said passing his hand across his forehead. "Then who did?"

"Mr. Marpenn," faltered Lady Araminta; "he wrote every word of it."

Mr. Fitzazure burst into a loud laugh. "Upon my word, my dear, you have made a great fool of yourself."

Then after a moment's thought he added, "And I suppose that rascal Marpenn has been frightening you into giving him bribes to hold his tongue?"

"Yes."

"And, what is worse, has placed you in a very awkward position—compromised you, in short."

"Oh no, Tom, I don't think it is as bad as that. I have been very foolish, but——"

"Well, people will talk, you know, Araminta; but I'll soon put an end to their confounded cackle."

Just then the door opened and the subject of their conversation entered the room unannounced—Mr. Marpenn had of late assumed all the privileges of a favoured intimate.

The secretary looked somewhat disconcerted by Mr. Fitzazure's presence. But his native impudence soon returned.

"Good morning, Lady Araminta," he said airily. "I wanted to speak to you in private for a moment—about your novel," he

added as he read signs of cold displeasure and half-veiled contempt in her face.

"Whatever you have to say to Lady Araminta can be said in my presence," said Mr. Fitzazure stiffly; "we have no secrets from each other."

"Indeed!" sneered Marpenn glancing stealthily at his patroness. "Not even on the subject of her ladyship's book?"

"No, sir; not even on that subject. If you can frighten a lady into giving you money and into enduring your society you will find that I am not easily intimidated," said Mr. Fitzazure with dignity.

"Indeed!" remarked the secretary with a sardonic smile, "then I presume that her ladyship is prepared to avow the real author of her very successful book."

"Oh no, Tom," put in Lady Araminta in a frightened whisper. "Don't let him do that, I should die of the ridicule."

"Pshaw! Who would believe him?" interrupted her husband contemptuously.

"There I think you are mistaken," returned the secretary suavely. "I have several notes written by her ladyship in which she refers to the book as my work."

"Is this true?" asked Mr. Fitzazure of his wife.

"I—am afraid so," she answered tearfully.

"Then," he added turning to Mr. Marpenn, who stood watching the pair with a well-assumed air of invincibility, "I suppose there is but one way out of this dilemma. Name your price, sir."

The secretary named it, and the amount might well stagger even a man of Tom Fitzazure's wealth. At first he obstinately refused to submit to the shameless extortion, but when his wife whispered to him: "Pay it, Tom, and I will promise to do without a single new dress for a year; and we won't come up to town next season. I will make any sacrifice rather than face the exposure he threatens," Mr. Fitzazure produced his cheque-book and reluctantly signed a draft for the amount named, which the secretary pocketed. He then bowed gracefully to Lady Araminta and, having successfully traded on a woman's weakness and foolish vanity and the generosity of a too-indulgent husband, left the room and the house.

* * * *

In spite of Mr. Fitzazure's hush-money some reports of the real authorship of Lady Araminta's novel got about, but they were not generally believed and to this day her ladyship gets a fair amount of *kudos* for her "literary talents."

But if people ask her, as they not infrequently do, when she is going to publish a new novel, Lady Araminta shakes her head and smiles.

For only Mr. Fitzazure and Mr. Marpenn know what was the cost of Lady Araminta's first—and last novel.

LONDON LETTERS,
TO VARIOUS COUNTRY COUSINS.

No. II.

DEAR COUSINS,

You have no idea how refreshing a thing, amid all the bustle and practicality of a busy season, was Professor Herkomer's "pictorial music play," performed at his little theatre at Bushey the other day. It is called "An Idyl," and it is well named. Some of us seek vainly for the idyllic and the Arcadian in this work-a-day world, and such glimpses of it as we gain are subjects for gratitude. I wonder if you, living in the country, would have appreciated the pictures of pastoral life that the professor gave us, as much as we did, who have been so long "in the great city pent." Herkomer's mind is a poetic one, as shown in his arrangement of the picturesque scenes, his wonderful effects of sunshine and moonlight and firelight, and the whole idea of the play. You have seen it detailed in all the papers, so I need not particularize its beauties here. The graceful lyrics from Mr. Joseph Bennett's pen have been beautifully set to music. Miss Dorothy Dene looked delightful as the village maiden, and Professor Herkomer was an ideal blacksmith of the dramatic sort. I wish you could have seen and enjoyed the play, as we did.

But you must not imagine that we who live in London have no refreshing sights and sounds wherewith to beguile ourselves in the turmoil of the season. The picture galleries are at their best just now, and every one prefers the New Gallery to the Royal Academy, except the benighted Philistines who come up from the country with the rust of twenty years or so upon their minds. Do not think I am making any personal reference. *You* are among those who can live away from cities without becoming dowdy in either mind or dress. It is not always so, as you are aware; and I was immensely amused the other day at hearing a clergyman's wife call the pictures at the New Gallery "transcendent and negligent of creed." Was it not too funny? She could hardly accuse Mr. Edward Kennard's water-colour drawings now exhibited at Messrs. Reynolds' Fine Art Gallery in St. James' Street, of any "negligence of creed." The love and worship of sport have been their inspiration, and a strong one, too, to judge by bold touches and vivid effects in which the drawings abound. They illustrate incidents in the capture of fish, flesh and fowl, with all the modern improvements of hammerless guns, split cane rods, and repeating

rifles. The exhibition might have been called "Sport up to Date," and you who career like very amazons after the miserable fox, would thoroughly appreciate the collection, could you but see it. Mr. Kennard's skill in handling rod, gun and rifle, as well as the brush, gives his pictures that accuracy which is the handmaid of art. There is a great demand for facsimiles of them, painted by hand. Peter has ordered a dozen for the decoration of his study, and they are promised in ten days. What a delightful time he will spend in hanging them! He is a carpenter spoilt.

Our great excitement this month was the wedding of the Duke of Portland and Miss Dallas-Yorke. The interest about it was quite abnormal, and greatly puzzled the bride, who remarked to the Vicar of St. Peter's that she could not think what all the fuss was about. She was mobbed in the Park and stared at at the opera, just as Mrs. Langtry used to be, ages and ages ago. We were lucky enough to get tickets for the church, and we *did* enjoy ourselves. The centre aisle was full of duchesses, countesses, marchionesses, dukes, earls, marquises, barons, viscountesses, and well-known commoners, whose names (*some* of them) are as much honoured as any duke's. The handsome toilettes were legion; but, alas! before our eager eyes could take in the detail of one lovely costume, it was obliterated by another. I retain a sufficient recollection of them *en masse*, however, to be able to tell you that printed foulards are the gowns of the present season; that waists are worn longer than ever, notwithstanding the Empire bodices; and that bonnets are getting smaller and smaller. One worn by a very handsome woman consisted of a yellow rose, a rosebud, and a bit of brown ribbon striped with gauze. The Marchioness of Granby looked delicately and spiritually lovely in her white dress. She is in mourning for her father, but wore one of the bride's favourite Malmaison carnations pinned in her bonnet and another on her bodice. A lovely girl was all in white, with the exception of a sleeveless bodice of russet velvet, which fitted tightly at the back, but turned back in front with revers that were lined with white watered silk. A jabot of white silk muslin, trimmed with frills, filled in the intervening space.

The bride is a lovely girl, of a style so uncommon that all the other beauties may hide their diminished heads. She is at least an inch taller than her husband, whose stature is about five foot ten. She has a short waist and long limbs, which, as you probably know, is considered a great beauty. Her colouring is considered by many to be her strongest point, though her features are regular enough; dark brown hair with gleams of the brightest, sunniest auburn is not very common, is it? Such is the duchess's, which she wears coiled upwards in a simple fashion that no barber's art could equal. Her eyes are of the deepest violet blue, and very large and soft. With these go a complexion that has all the delicate transparence of a blonde with the vivid softness and the

dark eyebrows of the brunette. These ingredients *ought* to make a lovely girl, ought they not? And I assure you that they do.

The novel idea of decorating the chancel with two young green trees in full leaf which formed an arch, proved distinctly successful. Behind were groups of white flowers and, the gas being lighted, all their snowy brightness came out in full relief. It was the prettiest wedding I ever saw, for though Lady William Nevill's, at the Oratory, was more beautiful in its floral decorations, the crowd of shabbily-dressed on-lookers who filled half the aisle, quite spoiled the effect, so many of their gowns and bonnets being black. At St. Peter's, every one was in brilliant toilets, even the crowds in the galleries wearing bright, soft tints and the floweriest of hats and bonnets.

Both bride and bridegroom looked blithely happy as they came down the aisle. The duke even seemed to be trying not to look too happy.

Her trousseau had some lovely gowns in it, and a delicious habit from Busvine, the great hierarch of cloth, so far as riding gear is concerned. His patent safety habit has saved many a life and, what in one sense is almost worse, hideous disfigurement. A tea gown in softest white crêpe de Chine draped à la Grecque over white veiling, is one of those poetic garments that only the beautiful among women ought to be permitted to wear.

I do love pretty clothes, and I am sure you do too, or you would not be so nice as you are, cousins.

I had the good fortune to see some delicious gowns that Vignon, of the Rue de Rivoli, who has dressed the French Royalties for many years, has made for the Duchesse de Chartres. One was a most lovely white crêpe de Chine dinner dress, richly embroidered in gold and silver, metal threads raised upon the milky surface of the crêpe. The style is Empire. Round the edge of the skirt is a wide band of the raised embroidery, measuring sixteen inches in depth, the effect of which I have never seen surpassed, to say nothing of the lovely folds into which the weight of it draws the crêpe. The bodice is cut low and the long sleeves are à la Juive.

Another, also a dinner gown, is in a very beautiful shade of buttercup yellow brocade. The train forms a *manteau de cour*. The low bodice is trimmed with a gold embroidery, and has a wide sash tied in front and falling to the edge of the dress. Another lovely dress is broché, with pale pink primulas and foliage upon a ground of moonlight blue; the skirt opens over a petticoat of pale pink satin veiled with costly old lace, its whiteness mellowed to a lovely tint by time. Two little walking dresses are in printed foulard, and a robe de chambre (which we should call a tea gown) is in brocaded oriental material, exactly like a cashmere shawl, only all silk, opening over pale pink crêpe de Chine. The wide, long sleeves are lined with pink, and a sash of pink silk falls over the underdress and ends in silver tassels.

C. E. H.